



**IT NEVER RAINS—**

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THE SEVEN STARS  
IT HAPPENED IN ESSEX  
DUSKY NIGHT  
THE HOUSE ON THE SALTINGS  
THE MAN WHO BUTTED IN  
THE GULLS FLY LOW

# IT NEVER RAINS—

by

VICTOR BRIDGES



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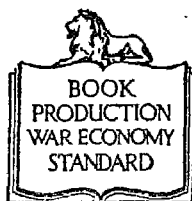
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TO ALL MY BROTHER SAVAGES

ESPECIALLY THOSE  
WHO SIGNED THE SALVER



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# IT NEVER RAINS—

## CHAPTER I

“ANOTHER little drink wouldn’t do us any harm.”

The silly jingle kept on repeating itself inside my head. With maddening persistence it came back again and again, until at last—I was no longer able to resist the temptation. Automatically my hand stole out towards the precious bottle which I had wedged securely beneath the after thwart. It was still half full of warm, brackish water, and easing out the cork with the utmost care I put my lips to the neck and sucked in a welcome mouthful. Never in my life have I tasted anything that seemed more delicious.

Resisting a mad impulse to gulp down the whole lot, I replaced the bottle and fished out what remained of the big slab of brown bread which old José had conferred upon me as a parting gift. Though it must have got pretty well soaked through during the night, the sun had now restored it to a dry and unappetizing toughness. In my present state of emptiness, however, I was in no mood to be critical, and stuffing a leathery crust into my mouth I leaned back again against the stern locker, and began to chew ravenously.

As I sat there swaying from side to side with the rolling of the boat my eyes wandered once more round the wide discouraging vista of deserted water. The wind had now died away into a fitful breeze and except for slight swell the sea was comparatively calm. In every direction it stretched out around me towards the distant horizon where it merged imperceptibly into the blue sky above. There was nothing in sight, not even a floating patch of seaweed, to relieve the monotony. Just miles and miles and miles of damn all.

A glance at my watch, which was still going, showed me that the time was a little after midday. I had been afloat for thirteen hours, and, since for most of that period a strong off-shore wind had been carrying me steadily north-west,

I must certainly have travelled a considerable distance from the coast. How far I had actually gone I hadn't the remotest notion. During that long spell of darkness the whole of my energies had been devoted to keeping the boat head on to a succession of charging seas and baling away desperately with a tin can whenever I could snatch a favourable opportunity. By the time the first glimmer of dawn had come to my assistance all traces of land had completely disappeared. I had found myself alone in a grey expanse of tumbling water with not even the distant peak of a mountain to remind me of the bloodstained horrors from which I had so recently escaped.

I suppose it was the idea of mountains that suddenly made me think of Terry Leighton. What was he doing now, I wondered—lying stiff and frozen in some gloomy crevice amongst those desolate Pyrénées or lounging back comfortably in a French café with a half-finished glass of brandy standing on the table in front of him? Somehow or other I had a feeling that he must still be alive. People of his type take a deal of killing, and as long as he had been lucky enough to squirm his way through Franco's outposts, the rest of the journey, however perilous and exhausting, would, in all probability, have been successfully accomplished. Of the various rapsallions which it has been my good fortune to encounter he unquestionably stood out as the toughest and most resourceful.

My mind went back to that ghastly morning, nearly a month ago, when he and I had crawled out of a battered cellar into what remained of the once picturesque little Basque village on which Goering's heroic Luftwaffe had been trying out their maiden skill. Of the tiny defending force to which we belonged, we were the only two left alive. Our twelve comrades, all decent, simple peasants, had been killed to a man, while of the few remaining inhabitants still clinging obstinately to their doomed homes not more than half a dozen had survived that merciless rain of death and destruction.

I had merely to shut my eyes and the whole pitiful scene rose up before me. I could see Terry squatting at my side

while I attempted to bandage up my injured leg, and I could hear his voice, with its queer half-Irish, half-Cockney accent, as he announced his conviction that the time had now arrived when the only sane course to adopt was to think of our own skins.

"'Twas all right to begin with," he had observed sadly, "but now those damned Huns and those lousy Wops have started spoilin' the fun, the quicker we fade out of it the better for our health. If we fool around here much longer we'll either be blown to hell or else shoved up against a wall and shot. 'Tis France I'm makin' for, me boy, and unless you're fonder of playin' the harp than I am it's you that will be keepin' me company."

"I'm heading for the coast," I had objected. "I'd never get across the Pyrénées with this blasted leg of mine. I've got some friends in a fishing village near Pesages who'll probably be able to let us have a boat. If I can fix it and we slip away in the night, we're almost bound to be picked up sooner or later."

Though we had argued our own repsective ideas for the best part of an hour, each of us in the end had decided to go his own way. We had separated regretfully, however, with no hard feelings on either side. Out of my surviving store of ready money, which I was carrying around with me in a waterproof belt, I had presented Terry with a five pound note. As a final mark of friendship we had agreed that if we both got back to London we would celebrate our reunion by a sumptuous dinner at the Café Royal, and before parting he had given me the name of some obscure pub in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road, where, according to him, a discreet enquiry from the landlord would be all that was needed to bring us together.

It had taken me a fortnight to make my way to José's cottage, where for the next two weeks I had been compelled to lie up nursing my damaged leg. The old man and his wife, with whom I had been lodging for a couple of happy months before the outbreak of civil war, had apparently realised the uselessness of carrying on the hopelessly uneven struggle. The fact that I had been fighting on their side, however,



had obviously won their hearts. They had both been anxious to assist me in any way they possibly could, and after several abortive efforts José had succeeded in getting hold of the small rowing boat in which at the present moment I was bumping about amongst the long Atlantic rollers. It had cost me a good part of my remaining capital, but in view of the summary treatment which foreign volunteers were apt to receive at the hand of Franco's "patriots," I had a feeling that every penny of the money had been wisely and judiciously invested. After all, I had done my best, and deeply as I sympathized with the Basques, the prospect of standing up in front of a firing squad was not one which appealed to my particular temperament. Besides, after all the research and labour I had put into the job, I badly wanted to write my book.

I had just arrived at this point in my reflections when I caught sight of something that made me sit up with an abrupt jerk. It was a faint smudge far away on the horizon. At first I was half afraid that my imagination might be playing tricks, and then, as the minutes dragged by and a dark object gradually climbed into view, I was able to distinguish a squat funnel and a long trail of drifting smoke. My joy was so overwhelming that in my excitement I as nearly as possible upset the boat. Whatever sort of vessel she might be she was apparently heading straight in my direction, and unless by some wretched mischance she happened to alter her course, it seemed almost a certainty that I should be able to attract her attention.

The only thing I possessed which I could use as a distress signal was my tattered and not over-clean shirt. Stripping it off with frantic haste I knotted it by the sleeves to one of my oars. On hoisting it up I discovered, to my delight, that it fluttered about sufficiently well to make an unmistakable S O S, and keeping my eyes glued on the advancing steamer, I began to think how much it would be advisable to tell the skipper in the happy event of his consenting to take me on board.

It was a problem which obviously needed consideration. Whatever plea I could put forward in defence of my conduct, there could be no doubt that in taking up arms on behalf of

my Basque hosts I had deliberately broken the unwritten contract on which my travelling scholarship was supposed to be based. I had vivid memories of my last interview with Professor Ingram, when the old boy, after congratulating me kindly on my success, had gone on to point out that the grant which I was to receive and the freedom which it would allow me to enjoy must be strictly devoted to the sole object for which the founder of the bequest had so generously endowed our university. That he would regard voluntary enlistment in a foreign army as a legitimate part of my duty appeared, on the face of it, to be distinctly improbable. He would take the line that having collected sufficient material I ought to have left the country at the outbreak of hostilities, and that in staying on and playing an active rôle in the fighting I had been merely gratifying my own taste for adventure. At the best I should be in for a severe lecture, while even if my work proved to be of lasting and genuine value I had considerable doubt whether the black mark against my name would ever be completely erased from the mind of the Faculty. In any case, it would certainly be a long time before they entrusted me with further and more important activities.

Provided it could be worked, my easiest course would be to slip back into England as unobtrusively as possible and invent some plausible story about having been recently released from a long period of compulsory internment. In order to bring this off, however, I should have to exercise a considerable amount of discretion. If I gave away my real name it might involve me in all sorts of trouble whatever port the approaching steam-  
for, the true facts concerning my  
inevitably be brought to light. A  
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In order to avoid such an ordeal I was prepared to face almost any amount of risks. My immediate and most pressing task was to think up a yarn which would be sufficiently convincing to satisfy the skipper. If I could only persuade him into taking me on board, the first of my difficulties would have been successfully surmounted. I could at least depend upon being given enough food and drink to keep me alive, and after that I should have to trust to my own wits to wrestle with any further problems that might subsequently arise. In my present predicament it was obviously no use trying to plan things out too far ahead.

All this time the unknown craft had been drawing nearer and nearer, though so far she had betrayed no sign of having noticed my existence. Now that I could see her more clearly I put her down as being a vessel of between a thousand and fifteen hundred tons. It was impossible as yet to distinguish her nationality, but from her general appearance I got the impression that she was probably a small ocean-going tramp. There are numerous boats of this type engaged in the North African trade, and the encouraging hope that she might turn out to be a Britisher welled up comfortingly in my heart. Though my Spanish and French are both fairly good, it is always easier to lie successfully in one's own native language.

I was just wondering how much longer my tired muscles would bear the strain when a sudden raucous hoot told me that my signal had been observed. I could see the curling fan of water round the oncoming bows gradually diminish in volume, and giving vent to an involuntary sigh of relief I lowered the oar and started to unfasten my shirt. I was so exhausted that my fumbling hands almost refused to function.

At about three hundred yards distance a sudden commotion in the water announced the fact that the engines had been put astern. By now I had succeeded in re-clothing myself; and peering eagerly across the intervening gap I was able to make out the name of my rescuer. Painted on

It was bow were the homely but magic words "*Emily Whatevendon*." They seemed to ring in my ears like a there could come music.

Looking on with a kind of strange half-dazed detachment I watched a boat being lowered over the side. As it pushed off and started moving towards me I saw that there were three men on board. Two of them were rowing, while the other, a powerfully built chap in the uniform of a ship's officer, was sitting in the stern shading his eyes from the sun. With a belated effort I pulled myself together and waved feebly.

On they came, their oars throwing up a shower of white spray, and crawling forward on my hands and knees I grabbed hold of the painter. I could hear somebody shouting, but whatever his instructions were they failed to reach my ears. I just crouched there on the wet planking until a sudden violent bump sent me lurching sideways, and a brawny tattooed arm reached out and clutched hold of my gunwale. The next moment I was conscious of a pair of sharp blue eyes scrutinising me keenly.

"Well," demanded their owner, "can you speak English?"

"Only too glad to get the chance," I replied.

He gave a friendly grin. "Who are you, and where the devil do you come from?"

"My name's Russell," I replied. "I slipped out last night from a little fishing dump near Pesages. Got caught there when the war started."

"Like that is it? Tumble in then and we'll see what the Old Man has to say." He relieved me of the painter, and hitched it to an adjacent cleat. "May as well bring along your boat while we're about it," he added. "She'll probably fetch something if we can get her on deck."

"Thanks very much," I muttered.

With a helping hand from one of the sailors I scrambled on board, and dropped down wearily into the vacant place alongside my inquisitor. He was a good-looking fellow of about my own age, with a pleasant, sunburned face and a magnificent chest.

"Feeling a bit cheap, I expect," he observed as we began to swing round. "You must have had a hell of a doing if you've been out all night in a thing like that."

"It wasn't very much fun," I agreed "Can't say I was altogether sorry when I saw you popping up out of the blue."

"I should say not." He grinned again, showing a set of strong white teeth. "Well, you'll be all right now as long as you can smooth down the Old Man. He was a bit peeved at having to stop, but I don't imagine he'll go so far as to turn you adrift again."

"Do you mind telling me his name?" I ventured.

"Captain Ellis. He's the owner as well as the skipper. I'm his First Officer, and my name's Martin. Are you a Londoner by any chance?"

"I was living there before I came out here," I replied.

"You've dropped on your feet then. We're putting in at Bordeaux for a few hours, but after that we shall be heading straight for home. Bar accidents we ought to be in the River by Sunday."

We were rapidly approaching the *Emily Hart*, which on closer inspection proved to be badly in need of a coat of paint. Leaning over the side of the bridge and staring down at us from under his peaked cap stood a short, sturdy man with a grizzled beard whom I took to be the skipper. To judge by his expression he was in no very amiable mood, and as we progressed towards the iron ladder amidships I began to wonder a little uncomfortably what sort of welcome I was likely to receive.

"Think you can manage by yourself?" enquired Martin. "If not I'll go first and fix you up with a line."

"You needn't trouble, thanks." I shook my head. "Strikes me I've been quite enough of a nuisance as it is."

Bringing us skilfully alongside, the two sailors shipped their oars. The foot of the ladder was just within my reach, and grabbing hold of it as the boat lifted, I swung myself out and got my foot on the bottom rung. After that things seem a trifle blurred. I have a dim recollection of clambering up step by step until a pair of trousers suddenly met my eyes; then, almost as I was on the point of collapsing, a powerful hand seized me by the collar and I was hauled forward through a gap in the rail.

"Narrer squeak that were, Mate. 'Nother bloomin' second and you'd 'ave bin dahn in the ditch."

The speaker was one of a small cluster of men who had apparently gathered round to assist in the proceedings. They all struck me as being obviously English, but before I had had time to make any further discoveries Martin was already on deck and beginning to rap out his instructions. Glancing about me I saw that the skipper had descended from the bridge and was making his way towards where we were standing.

"So this is what's held us up?" He glared at me distastefully. "Who is he, and what does he think he's playing at?"

"He's a Londoner, sir. Name of Russell. Tells me he's been a prisoner ashore ever since the scrapping started. Seems to have got hold of a boat and cleared off in the dark. Been out all night, according to his own story."

I was subjected to a brief but searching inspection. "Well, you're lucky to be alive, if that's the case. Feel you could do with a drink and a lie down, I suppose?"

"I'm a bit done in at the moment, sir," I admitted. "I've been laid up for a couple of weeks and——"

"All right, I'll talk to you later on. Put him in the Second Officer's cabin, Mr. Martin, and let him have some cocoa with a tot of rum in it. When you're finished clearing up I'd like you to take over. I've got some papers I want to look through."

He turned away abruptly, and obeying Martin's signal I accompanied him across the deck in the direction of the bridge. There were two doors facing the starboard side, and pushing open the nearer of them he shepherded me into a cramped little compartment which was of just sufficient size to contain a washstand, a table and chair and a small set of fixed lockers. On the bunk were a couple of neatly folded blankets and a striped pillow without its covering.

"Here you are," remarked my escort. "This is where our Number Two hangs out when he's on show. He went down with appendicitis at Melilla, and we had to leave him

in the hospital. The Bos'un's carrying on, but he prefers to stick to his own quarters."

"It's damned good of you to treat me like this," I replied. "I wonder if you'd mind telling the Captain how grateful I am."

"You can tell him yourself when he comes along. Meanwhile, if I were you, I'd turn in and have a rest." He produced a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches. "Better take these," he added, "and I'll get hold of the cook and see about some cocoa and biscuits for you."

I made an attempt to thank him, but brushing it aside with a careless "that's O.K.", he stepped out and closed the door after him. As he did so a slight quiver ran through the ship and the next instant a low vibrating hum announced the fact that the engines were again in motion.

A trifle dizzily I sat down in the chair and removed my boots. Then taking off my coat and trousers I unrolled the blankets to their full length and stretched myself out on the bunk. I was so relieved at having surmounted the first obstacle that my only sensation for the time being was one of blissful and almost incurious contentment.

I must have been lying there for about ten minutes in a sort of pleasant semi-conscious doze when I was abruptly aroused by a vigorous knock. Before I could reply my visitor had appeared in the doorway. It was the same chap who had pulled me on board, and as I struggled up into a sitting position I observed that he was carrying a tray on which stood a large steaming china mug and a couple of solid looking biscuits. He greeted me with a cheerful wink.

"Makin' yourself at 'ome, ain't you? Quite right, too, cocky. Do the saime meself if I was in your shoes." He dumped down the tray upon the table and surveyed me with obvious curiosity. "Wot's it like over there among them Dagoes? Cuttin' each other's throats proper from wot I 'eard at Melilla."

I nodded. "Yes, it's a messy business. The Basques were putting up a damned good show till Franco got Hitler to send over some planes. I don't imagine they'll be able to hang on much longer now."

"So you thought you'd skip out, eh?" He chuckled. "Best thing to do, if you ask me. No sense in coppin' a bellyful of lead, not when it's all a question of a lot o' dirty furriners."

"That's pretty much how it struck me," I agreed.

"Well, you shove that down your neck and you'll feel a sight better. Got a nice drop o' rum in it that has, saime as the skipper ordered."

With a parting grin he took himself off, and reaching out for the tray I hoisted it up on to the bunk and set about sampling its contents. I have tasted quite a number of mixed drinks in the course of my life, but rum and cocoa was a new one on me. As a pick-me-up after a night in an open boat, however, there was much to be said in its favour, and by the time I had emptied the mug and demolished both the biscuits my rescuer's optimistic forecast was already beginning to work. As he had predicted I was unquestionably "a sight better," and helping myself gratefully to one of Martin's cigarettes I started to meditate upon the pressing problem of what I was to say to the Skipper.

The impression of him which I had carried away from our brief interview was not altogether discouraging. I had a feeling that his bark was worse than his bite; indeed the mere fact that he had stopped his ship in answer to my signal seemed sufficient proof that he possessed a streak of humanity from which it might be possible to extract some sort of successful response. The question was how to go about it. Should I stick to the story I had told Martin or would it be better to confess that I had actually been fighting on the side of the Basques, and that I had strong personal reasons for wishing to conceal the circumstances? If I could fake up some yarn on these lines it might turn out to be my wisest policy. It would at least account for the somewhat furtive manner in which I had made my exit, and it would explain why I was so particularly anxious to slip back into England without attracting any unnecessary publicity.

With an instinctive movement my fingers went to my belt. I still had twenty-five pounds left in English money,



and the thought occurred to me that if I offered to pay handsomely for my passage Captain Ellis's views with regard to the official aspect of the business might be disposed to undergo a certain amount of modification. That this desirable process could be achieved by my own unaided eloquence seemed a little too much to expect. To pick a man up at sea and bring him ashore without reporting the incident would most certainly be against the law. The penalties were probably severe, and the average skipper would doubtless need some special inducement before he would be prepared to face the risk. In the circumstances, the feel of that fat little wad tucked away under the oilskin was an immensely comforting sensation. It sent a thrill of agreeable if slightly premature hope trickling through my heart, and drawing contentedly at my cigarette, I set about the job of constructing a story which would contain just sufficient truth to stand up against a rigorous cross-examination.

The task was one which required a lot of careful working out, and I was still pondering over one or two awkward points when, without even a preliminary knock, the skipper himself walked into my cabin. His entrance was so abrupt that I barely had time to struggle up from the pillow.

"You can stop where you are," he remarked curtly. "I merely want to ask you a few questions." With a deliberate movement he closed the door and then stepping towards me took possession of the chair. Though his voice sounded as gruff as ever, I had an impression that he was looking a shade less unfriendly.

"If I may, sir," I said meekly, "I should like to thank you for your kindness. I'm very sorry to have given you so much trouble."

"So you ought to be; it's a serious business stopping a ship." He stared at me grimly, as though he were trying to weigh me up. "How much truth is there in what you were telling Mr. Martin? Have you really escaped from a prison camp, or did you invent that in order to get on board?"

"It wasn't a prison camp," I replied. "I got my leg hurt in an air raid, and I was being looked after by some friends of

mine who live at a fishing village near Pesages. They helped me to get away. If I'd stayed there till Franco's lot came along I'd probably have been shot."

"What have you been up to? You'd better be quite frank or you'll find yourself in trouble."

"I've no wish to keep anything back," I said untruthfully. "I came out here last year in order to study the language and to learn something about the Spanish wine trade with which my family is connected. I made a lot of pals amongst the Basques, and when the war broke out I felt it was up to me to lend them a hand. I've been in the thick of things for the last six months, and then as luck would have it the company I was attached to were practically wiped out by some of those stinking German planes. This was in a village up-country. I managed to get back to the coast, however, and as soon as my leg was better those friends I told you about fixed me up with a boat. I thought I'd rather run the risk of being drowned or starved than just sit there and wait for a firing squad. There was no sense in trying to fight any longer: now Hitler and Mussolini have chipped in its going to be nothing but a bloody massacre."

"And a rotten shame too!" growled Captain Ellis. "I know the Basques, and they're a very decent crowd, taking 'em all round. As for those blasted Dictators, what they want's a good kick up the backside!"

"That's a fact, sir," I agreed. "It's a pity the rest of the world doesn't seem to realize it."

"Well, I can't say I altogether blame you for quitting." He paused. "Felt you'd had enough of it and would like to go home to England, eh?"

"The sooner I can get there," I replied, "the better I'll be pleased. The only thing I'm worrying about is my great-aunt."

"Your *what?*"

"My Great-Aunt Susan," I explained. "She's an old lady of eighty and I believe she's left me most of her money. The trouble is that she's one of these peace-at-any-price faddists. She thinks that nobody ought to fight, under any circumstances, and if it comes to her ears that I'd been helping the

Basques she'd cut me out of her will before you could say Jack Robinson."

Captain Ellis nodded sourly. "I had a grandmother who was rather like that. Lots of brass, and left the whole lot to some damned home for stray cats. All I ever got was a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*."

"Then perhaps you can understand why I'm a bit anxious." I glanced at him hopefully. "My one chance would be to slip back without any fuss or bother, and put her off with some yarn about having been interned in a concentration camp. Unless I can do that my name's mud."

The skipper raised his eyebrows.

"Are you asking me to put you ashore without making any report to the authorities?"

"I don't suppose it could be managed," I murmured apologetically. "It was only a sort of last desperate hope."

"Hm! You've got a fairly cool cheek, haven't you? In addition to stopping my ship and giving you a free passage you expect me——"

"No, sir, not a free passage," I ventured to interrupt. "I've a little money left, twenty-five pounds as a matter of fact, and I was going to suggest that I should hand you over fifteen of that in payment for my keep. I should like to hang on to the rest so that I can buy myself some new clothes."

At the first mention of money a sudden gleam of interest had crept into my companion's eyes. It was as though I had touched some secret chord which vibrated instinctively at the slightest pressure.

"You understand that what you're proposing is a pretty tall order?"

"I realise that, sir," I admitted humbly.

"I don't go so far as to say it couldn't be done, but if anything of the sort happened it would have to be entirely without my knowledge."

"Naturally, sir."

He tilted back his cap, frowning reflectively. "We shall get into the River Sunday, and we ought to be up at our berth below the bridge somewhere around nine at night. As it happens that's the one slack time of the whole week.

It's quite likely that the Customs won't trouble to come on board till Monday, and if you chose to nip off quietly when no one was about, well all I could do would be to report the fact next morning. Of course it's ten to one you'd be nabbed by the police, and in that case you'd just have to take what's coming to you and keep your mouth shut."

"I'd chance it willingly," I said. "I don't know how much the old lady's got, but it ought to be a tidy packet. I'd hate to see it slip away without even making an effort." As I spoke I unfastened my belt and extracted three of my remaining five-pound notes. "Perhaps you'll allow me to settle up now, sir," I continued. "I believe it's the usual custom to pay for one's ticket in advance."

"Just as you like." Having inspected the money carefully he thrust it into his pocket, and then straightening his cap, hoisted himself to his feet. "Well, I must be getting along now," he announced. "The best thing you can do is to stay here and have a bit of a rest. There'll be some grub going about seven, and I'll tell Mr. Martin that you'll be feeding with him. Shouldn't advise you to discuss your private affairs; safer to stick to your original yarn and leave it at that."

"I'll do as you say, sir," I agreed.

He stamped out, shutting the door after him, and with a feeling of immense relief I refastened my belt and sank back against the pillow.

That my hastily concocted story should have gone down so successfully seemed almost too good to be true. The invention of Great-Aunt Susan had undoubtedly been an inspiration. She had supplied just that human touch which the situation demanded, and I had a feeling that except for the threatened loss of my mythical inheritance, Captain Ellis, however readily he might have accepted the passage money, would never have consented to the proposal that I should sneak ashore without waiting for the necessary formalities.

I thanked my lucky stars that I had had the sense not to give away my right name. If I had said it was Reid instead of Russell, I should have queered my pitch hopelessly. The University authorities had probably been making enquiries

with regard to my safety, and with such a clue in their possession the police would obviously have found little difficulty in running me to earth. As it was, I ought to stand a reasonable chance. There would be nothing to connect me with the missing fugitive who had surreptitiously vanished from the *Emily Hart*, while a satisfying explanation of my own sudden and unheralded reappearance would doubtless have suggested itself by the time I was back in my customary haunts.

Anyway, I should have plenty of leisure in which to brood over the problem. At present what I felt I needed most in the world were a few hours' sound sleep, and giving free play to a long, luxurious yawn I turned over on to my side and closed my eyes.

## CHAPTER II

LEANING over the port rail I looked on with considerable interest as little by little we worked our way in towards our appointed berth. It had just gone six, and the late afternoon sun was still streaming down with what seemed to be almost undiminished vigour. Strung out along the edge of the broad stone quay trailed a small army of expectant dock hands, the sound of whose voices, marked by a strong Bordeaux accent, travelled towards us across the intervening water. Up on the bridge, wrapped in a kind of Olympian dignity, stood the impressive figure of Captain Ellis.

"Ever been here before?"

I turned quickly, and found Martin at my elbow.

"Only once," I replied, "and that time I had about the best meal I've ever eaten. It was at a place called *Les Trois Lunes*, somewhere near the market."

"I know it. Topping little joint, and not too dear either."

"I suppose we couldn't run up there this evening?" I hazarded. "I'd love to stand you a dinner if you can possibly get away."

"Not a chance." He shook his head. "There's quite a lot of stuff to get off, and apart from that old Mac's having a spot

of bother with one of his engines. He wants help in fixing up some new gadget, and as he can't speak a word of French I'll have to go ashore and do the needful."

"I was afraid you'd be too busy," I remarked regretfully.

"Still, that's no reason why you shouldn't enjoy yourself." He consulted his watch. "We shall be alongside in about a quarter of an hour, and I shall be shoving off straight away. You can come with me if you like. We might have a quick one at the little boozer over there, and then you can push along up Town and gorge yourself comfortably. You'd better get back sharp at eleven, though. I don't suppose we'll be sailing before midnight, but the skipper's in a hell of a hurry to get off again, and he won't hang around waiting for you."

"Can't exactly see him doing it." I glanced up at the bridge and laughed. "Right you are," I continued. "I'll be ready, and looking out for you. Do you think your Second Officer would mind if I took a loan of one of his shirts? He's left a couple of 'em stuffed away in a locker, and this damned thing of mine's so filthy. I'm ashamed to be seen around in it."

"You help yourself," returned Martin generously. "It's his own fault for going sick and giving us all extra work."

He hurried away forward, and, pleasantly elated at the idea of sitting down again to a really well-cooked dinner, I sauntered leisurely after him and slipped quietly into my cabin. There was no reason to imagine that Captain Ellis would object to our arrangement, but I had a feeling that if I wished to make a certainty of it the wisest course I could adopt would be to keep well out of his sight.

By the time I had washed and got into my clean shirt I could guess, by the noises outside, that we were close up to the quay. Hoarse shouts in French and English filled the air, and standing there in front of the small mirror above the basin I took a last critical survey of my hastily-completed toilet. In my ragged clothes and with my face burned to a rich mahogany I certainly looked a bit of a ruffian. Even my closest friends would probably have had some difficulty in recognizing me, and for a moment an uneasy doubt flickered

through my mind as to whether the patron of *Les Trois Lunes* would permit me to desecrate his respectable establishment. Then, as I remembered the effect which the sight of a five-pound note usually produced upon a French restaurant proprietor, my temporary panic was immediately allayed.

On stepping outside I found everybody in a state of energetic bustle. The gangway was down, and under the watchful eye of the Bos'un half a dozen blue-bloused dock hands were already trooping on board. He was shepherding them towards an open hatch aft, and circling round unobtrusively until I had regained my former position on the rail, I lighted a cigarette and waited for the next development.

It was about ten minutes before Martin made his appearance. He came up from the engine-room where he had presumably been having a talk to Mac, and after paying a hurried visit to his own cabin advanced briskly across the deck and greeted me with an encouraging wink.

"All O.K.," he announced. "I saw the Old Man just now, and I mentioned that you were keen on going ashore. He didn't make any difficulties."

"Very decent of him," I murmured.

"Seems to have taken quite a fancy to you for some reason! Well, come along; I've no time to mess about."

Descending the gangway we struck off across the quay, on the opposite side of which ran a cobbled street backed by shops and warehouses. Wedged in among these stood a small estaminet, one of those typical little drinking dens that can be found decorating the waterfront in every port between Calais and Marseilles. It was fitted up with a bar, a large coffee urn and perhaps half a dozen chairs and tables. Behind the counter sat a fat-faced gentleman in shirt sleeves who was engaged in the delicate operation of picking his teeth. He glanced up at our entrance, and leading the way across the bare wooden floor, Martin interrupted his labours by asking for a couple of brandies:

"Safest thing to order here," he explained in English. "If you asked for whiskey, God knows what you'd get."

"This is my shout," I protested, "I——"

"Keen quiet, you're merely a ruddy refugee at present.

When we get to London you can splash it around as much as you like." He grinned amicably, and producing the money picked up his glass. "Here's fortune," he added, "and I hope you have a cheery evening. If I could only come with you'd we'd get hold of a couple of birds and make a four-some of it. Nice friendly place Bordeaux—plenty of girls cruising around looking for a bit of fun."

"Doesn't interest me," I replied. "All I want is a good dinner. After that I shall plant myself down outside a café and sit there till it's time to come back."

"Don't be too sure: you never know what you may run up against!" He gulped down the remainder of his brandy, and, declining my suggestion of another, took my arm and ferried me towards the door. As we emerged into the open an adjacent clock was striking seven.

"Have to leave you now, I'm afraid. That's the place I'm making for." He jerked his head towards a ramshackle building on the next corner, which looked like a cross between a garage and a marine store. "You follow the river as far as you can go, and then turn up to the left. The place you want is right at the top of the street."

With a parting wave he took himself off, and, not a little sorry at losing his friendly company, I lit a fresh cigarette and set out on my own. By now the declining sun had at last lost some of its energy, and a faint but refreshing breeze was beginning to drift in across the surrounding vineyards. From the direction of the *Emily Hart* came a bumping of crates, punctuated now and then by a gruff rumble which I took to be the voice of the Bos'un.

Pleasantly conscious of a really promising appetite, I strolled leisurely along to the end of the quay. From here the road continued to run parallel with the river, but owing to a succession of walled-in yards and wharves, it was no longer possible to obtain a view of the shipping. Most of the work in this quarter of the town seemed to have closed down for the night, and after plodding on for the best part of a mile I was thankful to arrive at a spot where further progress could only be made by following Martin's instructions and branching off to the left. I now found myself in a narrow, old-



fashioned street consisting chiefly of private houses. It led to a biggish, circular-shaped *place*, which I recognised immediately, and there, just in the extreme right-hand corner, stood the unpretentious little frontage of *Les Trois Lunes*, with the same two neatly-clipped bushes in their green tubs still decorating either side of the doorway.

On entering the rather stuffy, low-ceilinged room, I found quite a number of customers already in possession. There was an empty table for one in the near corner, however, and making my way to it with as little ostentation as possible, I hung up the disreputable hat which I had borrowed from José and slid modestly into the vacant chair.

As I was reaching out for the menu I suddenly caught sight of the proprietor. Although I had only seen him once before, his bald shining head and his massive white-waist-coated paunch had remained clearly impressed upon my memory. He had paused in the middle of a conversation with some of his other guests to shoot an enquiring glance in my direction, and, thinking it advisable to take the bull by the horns I nodded affably and gave him an encouraging wave. The next moment he had straightened up and was rolling ponderously towards me.

"Good evening," I said in French. "You won't remember me, but I lunched here about two years ago, and I have never forgotten your magnificent cooking."

He made a slight bow, at the same time eyeing me with ill-concealed mistrust.

"I must apologise for my appearance," I continued, "but these were the only dry clothes I was able to get hold of. The fact is that I was out on a yachting trip with a friend, and we ran into a bad storm and smashed ourselves up. Luckily there was an English steamer close by or else we should both have been drowned. She has just put in here to discharge some cargo, and I couldn't resist the temptation of slipping ashore and paying you a visit. I had always promised myself the pleasure of having another meal in your delightful restaurant."

"But Monsieur is most welcome." The proprietor's whole manner had undergone an abrupt transformation. "It is a

great pleasure to see him again, and I am desolated to learn of his misfortune."

"There is only one difficulty," I observed. "I'm afraid I have nothing on me but English money." As I spoke I produced the five-pound note which I had been keeping in readiness. "I don't know whether you would have any objection——"

"But of course not, Monsieur." With an expansive smile he accepted the proffered bait, and beckoning up a waiter sent him hurrying off to the pay desk. "In the meantime if Monsieur would care to give me his order——"

"Ah! Now we're getting to something really important." I leaned back and contemplated the crowded but rather illegibly written menu. "That," I continued, "is a point on which I should be glad of a little expert advice. You see I have waited a long time for this particular moment, and I want a dinner that will be worthy of the occasion. Perhaps you would be kind enough to make some suggestions?"

The proprietor was obviously flattered. "If Monsieur will place himself in my hands I would propose that he should begin with *Ecrivisse Bordelaise*. It is a speciality of the house."

"*Ecrivisse* by all means," I agreed.

"And then"—he paused meditatively—"then I would recommend *tournedos*—*tournedos* with *sauté* potatoes and truffles."

"Admirable," I interjected.

"For a sweet—ah, I have it—*Pêche Flambées Maison*. Monsieur may remember, perhaps—peaches cooked in brandy and served on hot toast."

"An inspiration." I laid down the menu with a sigh of approval. "How about the wine? I think I had better wait until the second course for that. It would be a sin to drink anything except claret."

"As Monsieur says. I have some 'twenty-four *Château Latour* which is truly magnificent. I am compelled to charge fifty francs a bottle, but to anyone who understands——" He gave an eloquent shrug.

"Practically a gift, eh?" I picked up the little pile of miscellaneous notes which the waiter had just deposited

upon the table. "Well, we'd better do the thing properly while we're about it. *Château Latour* let it be, and when it arrives I hope Monsieur will give me the pleasure of joining me in a glass. We will drink a toast to our next meeting."

Bowing again, and declaring that nothing would delight him more, my gratified host took his departure. It was obvious that his doubts with regard to my desirability as a customer had been effectively removed, and congratulating myself on the diplomatic skill with which I had handled a rather awkward situation, I settled down blissfully to enjoy my reward.

As a rule anything to which one has looked forward with unusual optimism is apt to turn out a trifle disappointing. That dinner, however, was certainly an exception. All three courses, the crayfish, the tournedos and the *pêche flambée* were what one might justly describe as gastronomic poems, while the 'twenty-four Latour, served up at exactly the right temperature, proved to be as delicate and delicious a wine as ever caressed the palate of sinful man. After the crude stuff with which I had had to content myself for the last year it was like sipping bottled sunshine to the accompaniment of stringed music.

At first I was so occupied in enjoying myself that I had no time for reflection, but about half way through the menu, after my friend the proprietor had duly honoured me by returning to sample his own nectar, my thoughts began to range ahead over the personal, and rapidly-approaching problems connected with our arrival in the Thames. I had had no further conversation with Captain Ellis, but as a result of our brief interview in the cabin, the outlook on the whole appeared to be fairly encouraging. Provided I selected the right moment the business of sneaking ashore ought to prove comparatively simple. Once I was clear of the dock all I should have to do would be to make for Mark Lane station and pop into the first Inner Circle that happened to come along. Before a hue and cry could be raised, I should be safely back at my lodgings on Campden Hill, and once there, with the excellent Mrs. Mudge as a guarantee of my bona-fides,

the likelihood of my having any trouble with the police struck me as being comparatively remote. It was not probable that they would exert themselves unduly about such an obscure person as the missing "Mr. Russell." Apart from the fact that I was known to have been in Spain there was nothing on earth to connect me with his disappearance, and as long as I was able to keep the news of my sudden return out of the papers, there seemed no particular reason why this happy state of affairs should not continue indefinitely.

The thought of Mrs. Mudge reminded me of my notes—that priceless collection of laboriously acquired memoranda which I had posted home to her for safe custody a few days before the actual outbreak of war. Having received no acknowledgment of its arrival I was feeling distinctly worried. Its loss would not only be a grave handicap to me in my future work, but it would also deprive me of the principal evidence with which I hoped to allay any unfortunate suspicions which might have arisen in the breast of Professor Ingram. Without that visible proof of conscientious industry the job of putting across a convincing story would obviously be more difficult.

Still it was no use spoiling the evening by brooding over a question that would soon settle itself. Unless the *Emily Hart* foundered we should be off the Tower Bridge by Sunday night, and within a few hours, at the most, my anxiety would be either confirmed or dispelled. In the meantime the sensible thing to do was to put my trust in Providence and to extract every ounce of satisfaction I could out of the present enjoyable interlude.

With this laudable resolve I lingered agreeably over the concluding stages of coffee and brandy, and then, lighting a cigar, asked for my bill. Considering the excellence of the dinner it was surprisingly moderate. The total, if I remember rightly, came to a hundred and thirty francs, and after bidding farewell to the proprietor, amid a flood of mutual compliments, I sauntered out again between the two little green tubs, feeling pleasantly at peace with the universe. According to my watch I still had a good two hours at my disposal before it would be necessary to return to the ship.

Making my way across the square I turned off in the direction of the market. From what I remembered of Bordeaux the most attractive place in which to while away the time would be one of those open air cafés facing the main quay in the centre of the town. I knew that if I worked round to the right I should be bound to arrive at my destination, and since it was a lovely evening and I was in no particular hurry, I was quite content to stroll leisurely ahead without making enquiries as to which was the nearest route.

The street I had entered proved to be a longish, narrow thoroughfare, shut in on one side by a high brick wall. The lower end was entirely deserted, and I was just approaching the point where it swung round in a sharp curve when I suddenly heard a startled cry, followed almost simultaneously by the quick pad of running feet.

It was none of my business, of course, but without pausing to reflect I jumped forward automatically. A couple of strides took me round the corner, and there, clutching a handbag and racing directly towards me, I saw the unsavoury-looking figure of a typical French hooligan. Some twenty yards further back a girl, whom he had apparently knocked down and robbed, was scrambling up shakily from where she had fallen.

My abrupt appearance took her assailant by surprise. Unable to check himself he made a desperate attempt to swerve past me, but timing my effort to perfection, I thrust out my foot and just succeeded in catching his ankle. He came down like a shot rabbit, at the same moment letting go his hold on the bag.

Knowing the breed I had to deal with, I was taking no chances. As he rolled over and pulled out his knife, I launched a well directed kick that sent it tinkling across the road. A snarl of rage and pain rent the air, and in less time than it takes to write the words I was standing there in undisputed possession of the field, with my baffled and blaspheming adversary scuttling off as fast as his legs would carry him. From start to finish the whole encounter had occupied about thirty seconds.

Having retrieved the knife and picked up the bag, I stepped

forward to meet its owner. As she approached I noticed that she was remarkably pretty—a dark-haired, slimly-built girl in the early twenties, with bright hazel brown eyes set rather wide apart, a short, slightly tip-tilted nose, and the most adorably shaped lips I have ever seen in my life. Though a trifle out of breath and obviously shaken by her fall she came up to me smiling gallantly.

“C’était très gentil de votre part, Monsieur, et très courageux. J’en suis très reconnaissante.”

Her voice was as charming as the rest of her—low and clear, with a kind of natural music about it that I found indescribably attractive.

“Mais ce n’était rien, Mademoiselle,” I protested. “J’adore me mêler des affaires des autres. C’est une de mes distractions préférées.” I handed her the bag. “Quelle brute! J’espère qu’il ne vous a pas fait mal.”

“Pas beaucoup. Quelques blues, c’est tout.” She hesitated. “You are an Englishman, are you not?”

I smiled ruefully. “Is my accent so bad as all that?”

“No, no: it was the way you spoke, not how you pronounced your words. You see I—I live in England myself.”

“You don’t say so!” I observed. “Well, if it’s not an impertinent question, may I ask what you’re doing strolling about Bordeaux?”

“I came over here to see a friend who is very ill. She has an apartment in the next street. I had just left her, and was going back to my hotel when that—that *individual* knocked me over and robbed me of my bag.”

“Where is your hotel?” I enquired.

“Not far from here. Down on the quay at the corner of the Rue Maritime.”

“But that’s the very spot I’m making for. May I walk along with you and see that you don’t get into any further trouble?”

“Why, yes. I should be most grateful. I don’t know how to thank you for what you have already done for me.”

“If you really mean that there is one quite simple way.” We had started to move forward together up the narrow

pavement. "I've got about an hour and a half with nothing to do, and I was going to try and amuse myself by sitting at a pavement café and looking at the people. I wonder whether you would take pity on me, and give me the pleasure of your company for a little while?"

"But of course. There is nothing I should enjoy more." I saw her cast a quick sideways glance at my somewhat shabby outfit. "I only make one condition; that is that you regard yourself as my guest."

"You shall pay for the first drink, anyhow," I promised her. I held out the knife which I was still carrying in my left hand. "What are we to do with this interesting little souvenir? I can't walk around all the evening looking like Lady Macbeth."

"I should drop it in there if I were you." She nodded towards a pillar box which we were just in the act of passing.

"Good idea." I slowed down and, taking a cautious look round, poked it in through the slit. "You never know," I added, as we moved on again; "if the postman happens to find out that his wife has been unfaithful it may come in handy."

She laughed. "You are fond of helping people, evidently."

"When I feel that it's a deserving case."

"I suppose I should take that as a compliment."

"It was intended to be." I paused for a moment, and then summoned up my courage. "I wonder if you'd mind telling me your name."

"Not in the least. It's Despard—Suzanne Despard."

"Suzanne Despard." I repeated the two words slowly. "I'm sure I've heard of you before somewhere or other."

"You may have. I am a singer—a professional singer. I have sung at concerts in London, and also at one or two West End Night Clubs. I—I don't know whether you have ever been to a place of that kind."

"Bit out of my line," I confessed. I could see that she was taking another covert glance at my clothes.

"Well, you haven't missed much. Most of the people who go there are horribly uninteresting. They imagine

they are having a good time simply because they are spending a lot of money. It seems very stupid to me, but I expect that is because I am half French."

Before I could reply she had led the way round another turning to the right, and there, straight ahead of us, lay a broad stretch of open quay with the cheerful lights from one or two neighbouring cafés throwing golden reflections across the black surface of the river. Somewhere in the distance a string band was playing the Intermezzo from Cavalleria.

"Shall we try the Normandie?" she suggested. "I had some coffee there this morning. It is almost next door to my hotel."

"Suit me as long as it's not too smart," I agreed. "You don't want to be seen sitting around with someone who looks like a tramp."

She shrugged. "You need not worry about that. I know hardly anybody in Bordeaux."

Heading for a brightly illuminated establishment with an array of chairs set out in front of it, we took possession of an unoccupied table a little way back from the pavement. Our nearest neighbours were two elderly bearded men in black alpaca coats, who appeared to be completely engrossed in a game of backgammon.

"What would you like?" asked my companion as a waiter shuffled forward enquiringly.

"I've just had a brandy," I said. "If you don't mind I think I'll stick to that."

She gave the order, at the same time demanding a Dubonnet for herself, and then opening her bag and producing a miniature looking-glass sat up and contemplated her reflection.

"It is I who ought to apologise," she remarked. "If I had known what I looked like I would have run in first and tidied myself up."

"But you look charming," I assured her. "You remind me of an angel who's been flying about in a high wind."

"That is a very pretty little speech." She studied me for a moment or two with a kind of puzzled curiosity. "You



know you are a rather difficult person to sum up. At first I thought you were a sailor off some ship in the harbour."

"You weren't far out. As a matter of fact I came ashore about two hours ago, and I've been standing myself dinner at a place called *Les Trois Lunes*. We're sailing again at midnight, and I've got to be back on board sharp at eleven."

"I do not quite understand now." She frowned. "You may be dressed like a sailor, but you certainly do not talk like one. Have you any objection to telling me who you are?"

At that moment the waiter came up with our drinks, and while he was pottering around I sat cogitating over the question as to how far it would be wise to commit myself. The fact that Suzanne lived in London made it obviously advisable to exercise a certain amount of caution. She was so attractive, however, and I was already developing such a whole-hearted desire to improve our acquaintance that a mere string of deliberate lies struck me as being totally out-of-place. What would meet the case best, I decided, would be a judicious blend of fact and fiction.

"Well," I said, "you've been kind enough to let me know about yourself, so the very least I can do is to return the compliment. My name is Alan Russell, and I'm what you might describe as a deserter. I've been fighting in Spain and the night before last I managed to slip away in a boat and get picked up by an English ship. I am thankful to say they're taking me home to London."

Her hazel eyes had lighted up with an evident and rather gratifying interest. "You went out as a volunteer?"

I shook my head. "No, I went out for purely selfish reasons. I had always wanted to see the Basque country, and last year I managed to scrape together enough money to pay for my passage. I meant to wander around and write articles about anything quaint or amusing I happened to run across. I hoped I'd be able to sell them and collect enough cash to keep going."

"Then you are an author—a man of letters?"

"Nothing so dignified as that. I scribble a bit, occasionally, like a good many other people."

"But you said you had been fighting. Do you mean that you joined the Basque army?"

"What else could I do? All the people I'd met had been uncommonly decent to me, and when Franco and his Fascist pals started in on them I couldn't just sheer off without lending a hand. I muddled around with them for a time, and then got laid out in a bombing raid. Luckily an old fisherman I knew took me into his cottage and looked after me. He saw it was all up with his own people, and as soon as I was well enough to get about he found me a boat and helped me to clear off. Nothing very heroic in it, you see: I just took my chance and faded out while the going was good."

"Oh, there is no doubt about your being English: no one else would talk in that stupidly modest way." She gave an impatient little shrug. "I have lived in your country for ten years, and even now there are times when I feel I should like to jump up and slap some of you."

"I should rather enjoy it," I confessed, "but don't you think we'd better wait till we get outside?"

"I am sorry." She laughed. "It was very rude of me, and it was most ungrateful."

"Nonsense," I replied. "You are perfectly right. As a nation we are much too smug and self-satisfied. A properly organized campaign of slapping would do us a world of good."

"I think you have behaved splendidly. It was very noble of you to stop and fight for those poor people." She sipped her Dubonnet, looking at me thoughtfully over the rim of the glass. "What do you intend to do when you get back to London?"

"I shall have a shot at writing some of those articles."

"But in the meantime—you will forgive my asking—have you—have you enough money to live on until you are able to sell them?"

"Oh I shall manage all right," I replied. "One can always pick up a job of some sort."

She put down her glass, and after a short pause leaned forward across the table. "Suppose I were to offer you one,

Mr. Russell. Do you think you would be willing to work for me?"

"For you!" I straightened up in my chair. "Why, I can't imagine anything more delightful. You're exactly the sort of employer I've been looking for all my life. I believe the whole thing must have been arranged by providence."

"I am speaking seriously—quite seriously. I have just been given some information which has put me into a very difficult and—and perhaps rather dangerous position. As yet I have had no time to make any definite plans, but when I get back to England I shall probably want someone to help me—someone like yourself who is not afraid of taking risks. I—I should be prepared to pay you for your services, of course. I know it all sounds ridiculously vague and melodramatic, but just at the moment I am afraid I can't explain things any more clearly."

"There's no need to. You've already said enough to make my mouth water." I paused. "Isn't it a trifle rash, though, making a suggestion like that to a man whom you really know nothing about?"

"I know you are brave," she said simply, "and somehow or other I feel that I can trust you. I have a sort of instinct about people, and up till now I have always found that I have been right."

"I wish I could say the same. I've made one or two bad bloomers in my time." I offered her a cigarette, and lit another for myself. "Well," I continued, "to revert to the business in hand, I can only say that I consider the proposition a most attractive one. As far as I'm concerned you can regard your offer as being gratefully accepted."

"I am glad."

"When do I enter upon my duties?" I enquired.

"How soon will you be back in England?"

"We're supposed to arrive in the Thames Sunday afternoon. I hope to get ashore sometime in the evening."

"You will be staying in London?"

I nodded. "I shall have to collect some clothes. I left one or two odds and ends with an old landlady of mine in Kensington."

"Kensington! That is not very far from where I live." She sat silent for a moment as though turning the matter over in her mind. "I think, on the whole, the best plan will be for you to ring me up. Could you do that on Sunday night or Monday morning?"

"It would give me the greatest pleasure," I replied truthfully.

"I will let you have my number." She opened her bag again, and, producing a tiny memorandum book, tore out one of the pages. "Here you are," she continued, handing me what she had written. "Telephone to me there as soon as you are back, and we will arrange to meet somewhere. By then I shall have decided on what I am going to do."

I looked at the little slip, and tucked it away carefully in my watch case. "Well, that's that," I observed. "If you don't hear from me it will mean that I've fallen overboard and been drowned." I glanced round in search of the waiter. "How about another Dubonnet?" I suggested.

"No, thank you: I do not want any more, really." She re-closed her bag, and much to my disappointment moved back her chair as though about to rise from the table. "I must go back to the hotel and pack my things. I am catching the eleven-thirty train to Paris."

"That's a shattering blow," I said sadly. "I was looking forward to at least another hour of your society."

"I am sorry I can't stay any longer. I should have liked to hear some more about your adventures in Spain." She got up and stood looking at me with a faint air of embarrassment. "You—you won't be offended I hope, but if it would be of any help to you just now I should be only too pleased to make you a small advance. You need not mind accepting it. I—I can deduct it from what I arrange to pay you later on."

I shook my head. "It's very generous and kind of you, but as a matter of fact I still have a few pounds left. Quite enough to carry me on for the present, anyhow."

"If you are perfectly certain——" She shrugged and held out her hand. "Au revoir then, and thank you once more

for saving me from being robbed. I shall expect to hear from you either on Sunday night or Monday morning."

I bent down and kissed the tip of her fingers. "Au revoir," I replied. "I won't offer to see you into your hotel. I'm afraid my clothes might shock the hall porter."

"Most considerate of you." A momentary smile flickered round her lips. "For a tramp, Mr. Russell, you seem to have very delicate feelings."

Leaving me to digest this parting shot she stepped out again on to the pavement. The next instant she had disappeared, and resuming my seat amid furtive glances from the two back-gammon players, I beckoned up the waiter and ordered another brandy.

The entire business had been so intriguing and unexpected that at first I found it a trifle difficult to collect my thoughts. I shouldn't describe myself as being particularly impressionable, but there was certainly something about Miss Suzanne Despard which interested and attracted me to an extent that I could hardly explain to myself. My predominant emotion was a strong desire to see her again as soon as possible, but apart from this I was consumed by an overpowering curiosity with regard to the remarkable offer of which I had just been the recipient. What was it all about, and what on earth had induced her to put forward such an extraordinary proposition? If she were in any serious difficulties a girl with her beauty and charm must surely possess plenty of friends to whom she could turn for advice or assistance. Why pick upon a complete stranger like myself, and why, in the name of goodness, select one who, even according to his story, was little, if anything, better than an irresponsible adventurer.

One could only assume that a job demanding such peculiar qualifications was likely to be of a stimulating and somewhat unconventional character.

The longer indeed that I sat there brooding over the problem the more forcibly it appealed to my imagination. Although for the moment my own position was distinctly awkward and delicate the prospect of complicating it still further left me curiously unperturbed. No matter how

foolish and risky it might be, I was already fully resolved to carry on with my share of the arrangement, and it was with this determination firmly established in my mind that I eventually rose from the table and set out on my return journey to the ship. All the way back a vision of Suzanne's face, with its short, tip-tilted nose, hovered agreeably in front of my eyes.

On arriving at the gangway the first person I encountered was Martin. He had just come out of his cabin, and catching sight of me as I stepped on board he pulled up and welcomed me with an enquiring grin.

"Had a good time?" he demanded.

"Grand," I assured him. "I sat and stuffed myself until I couldn't eat another morsel."

"What did you do afterwards?"

"Went along to one of those open air cafés facing the river and watched a couple of old boys playing backgammon."

"Backgammon? That must have been damned dull."

I shook my head. "I found it quite exciting," I declared.

### CHAPTER III

VERY quietly I opened the door of my cabin, and standing just inside the threshold took a cautious survey of my immediate surroundings. We were lying close up alongside a wharf about three hundred yards below Tower Bridge. It was an ancient wharf, with what appeared to be a rather rickety-looking crane in one corner. On the far side were a couple of closed gates, and in front of these, reading a paper and puffing placidly at a clay pipe, sat an elderly gentleman who was presumably the watchman.

Except for a couple of hands leaning over the after rail the deck itself was deserted. The only moving object that met my eye was a passing tug with a long string of lighters in tow. She was heading leisurely downstream, leaving a trail of black smoke behind her, and I could hear the faint sound of the water as it spread out from her blunt bows and rippled

away shoreward to splash amongst the piles. Otherwise, whatever might be happening elsewhere in the world, the Port of London seemed to be lapped in a Sabbatical calm.

Consulting my watch, I discovered that it was a quarter past eight. We had been at our present berth for well over an hour, and so far as I was aware no representative of His Majesty's Customs had as yet condescended to put in an appearance. Martin and the Skipper were both closeted in the latter's cabin. From a remark which Captain Ellis had made in my hearing I had gathered that they would probably be engaged for a considerable period, and taking everything into consideration it struck me that if I were waiting for a favourable chance to sneak ashore the present opportunity was about as good a one as would be likely to present itself. It seemed to be merely a question whether I could bluff my way past the watchman.

Strolling casually across the deck and descending the gangway, I sauntered forward to where he was seated. As I approached he glanced up from his paper, and I saw, to my relief, that he was a genial-looking old fellow, with a pair of small, twinkling blue eyes and a nose that in colour and in shape reminded me of a slightly over-ripe tomato. It was the last-named feature which provided me with a sudden inspiration.

"Know if there's a pub open anywhere close by?" I inquired. "I could do with a pint of beer after some of the foreign muck I've been shifting lately."

He removed his pipe and eyed me sympathetically. "There's the Victory and the Nag's 'Ead," he replied. "Get a decent glass at either of 'em."

"No harm in my slipping out and having a quick one, I suppose?"

"'Tain't strictly in order, not till you've been cleared by the Customs. Don't really matter, though, not of a Sunday night." As he spoke he hoisted himself up. "Keep you company if I could, only I daresn't leave this 'ere bloomin' wharf. Much as my job's worth, an' that ain't sayin' a lot, neither."

Hauling out a key, he inserted it into the lock, and with

a faint creak one of the gates swung open. I produced a shilling and smuggled it into his hand.

"Have one with me later on," I suggested. "It must be a dry job sitting here on a hot night like this."

"Not 'alf it ain't. Thanks, mate, and good luck to you." He pocketed the coin and jerked his head towards a corner building a little way up the street. "That's the Victory over there. No call to 'urry yerself. I'll be arahnd all right when yer wants to come in."

It occurred to me that if he were speaking the truth, he was booked for a lengthy vigil, but, thinking it inadvisable to acquaint him with this fact, I contented myself with a word of thanks and stepped out into the road. The next moment the gate had closed behind me.

I was in a narrow winding street which bore a distinct resemblance to the one that I had followed after leaving the quay at Bordeaux. It consisted of offices, stores and gloomy-looking warehouses, all of which appeared to be closed for the week-end. The only exception was provided by the Victory, from the open windows of which came the dull rumble of men's voices, punctuated now and then by a shrill outburst of female merriment. A few pigeons strutted about the gutter searching hopefully for a belated meal.

Greatly inspired by the easy manner in which I had negotiated my first hurdle, I struck off westward. A short walk brought me out at the entrance to the bridge, and skirting round the north side of the Tower, I pursued my way briskly along the almost deserted pavement until I arrived at Mark Lane Station. The next minute, with thankfulness in my heart and a ticket for High Street, Kensington, in my pocket, I was stepping triumphantly on to the moving staircase.

It was not until I was safely in the train that I began to think about Mrs. Mudge and wonder how she would react to my sudden and unexpected appearance. I could picture her sitting at the piano in her small, crowded back room indulging in her favourite Sunday recreation of singing a hymn or two before she retired to bed. Though one of the kindest and best-hearted women in the world, she was a



member of some obscure sect which cherished the odd conviction that everyone outside their own favoured circle was in imminent danger of eternal damnation. Since this belief, however, in no way interfered with her merits both as a cook and a landlady, I had found the neat, well-kept little house on Campden Hill an exceedingly comfortable headquarters. So much so, indeed, that I had kept the rooms on during my sojourn in Spain, and, ill as I could afford the extravagance, I blessed myself now for having committed it. With this snug refuge at my disposal I should at least have some place where I could lie low for a few days and wait upon events. If no unfortunate developments occurred I could then present myself at the University with a well-polished and thoroughly convincing story, and after that, provided my notes had arrived safely, I should be able to settle down in peace and get on with my work.

The only disconcerting factor appeared to be Suzanne. Situated as I was, the danger of getting myself involved in any further complication was sufficiently obvious. Although, so far, she had given me no definite idea as to the nature of the services which I should be expected to render, her statement that she needed someone who was not afraid to "take a risk" conveyed a warning hint that it was impossible to disregard. It seemed like being the kind of job which anyone who wished to steer clear of trouble would be well advised to avoid. To entangle myself any deeper in the matter would be an act of deliberate folly, and yet, despite all the urgings of common sense, the thought of those wide-set hazel eyes and that provocative little tip-tilted nose, lured me towards the telephone with a positively irresistible attraction. After all, I argued with myself, there could be no irreparable harm done by just keeping my promise and ringing her up. I might somehow succeed in discovering her address, and then, even if the immediate renewal of our acquaintance appeared to be too hazardous, I should at least have the means of getting in touch with her again as soon as my own affairs were a trifle more settled. The prospect of losing sight of her altogether was too depressing to be seriously contemplated.

At somewhere about this stage in my reflections the train rumbled into High Street. According to the station clock it was just past nine, and a minute later I was mounting the familiar slope which leads up to the Campden Hill Water-works. Being a fine evening there were a good many people taking the air, and the possibility of meeting someone I knew kept me constantly and unpleasantly on the alert. Nothing of the sort happened, however, and, blessing my guardian angel for arranging matters so conveniently, I pulled up in front of number six Peel Crescent and hurriedly pressed the bell. As I stood waiting I could hear the plaintive strains of a hymn filtering out from Mrs. Mudge's private sanctum.

The door was opened by an old acquaintance in the shape of Gertie, the little fat maid-of-all-work who usually brought me up my meals. For a moment she stood gaping at me incredulously, and then, as I moved forward, her round, vacant face became suddenly transfigured.

"Coo!" she gasped. "Why, if it ain't Mr. Reid!"

"Didn't you recognise me?" I demanded.

"Not to start with." She drew in a long breath. "My, ain't you sunburned? You look like one o' them Arab fellers wot come round sellin' onions."

"You flatter me." I removed my disreputable hat and tossed it on to the hall table. "Well, how are you," I inquired, "and how's Mrs. Mudge? Still keeping up her Sunday concerts, I sec."

"Ow yes, sir. She always likes a bit of a 'ymn after she's finished her supper," Gertie giggled. "She won't 'alf get a start when you walk in on 'er. Only speakin' about you this mornin' she was."

"Don't say anything; we'll take her by surprise." I tiptoed quietly as far as the door of the sitting-room and stood listening. I was just able to distinguish the words of what appeared to be the closing verse.

"A hundredfold the sinners  
Will be repaid in Hell.  
If you think such men winners  
We disagree—Farewell."

The last note faded unctuously away, and with a gentle tap I turned the handle. There was a startled exclamation, and before I could advance any farther Mrs. Mudge had pushed back the stool and risen shakily to her feet.

"Mr. Reid! Well, I never!"

"Sorry if I gave you a jump." I stepped forward and taking both her hands pressed them heartily. "Hadn't a chance to let you know I was coming; got in at the docks an hour ago and bundled straight along here."

"Couldn't believe me own eyes, not when I saw it was you." She looked me up and down as though still only half convinced. "Good gracious me, what have you been doing to yourself? Why, you're as thin as a rake, and as for those clothes of yours——"

"You needn't rub it in; I know I'm a bit of a scarecrow." I laughed, and, releasing her hands, pushed her gently down on to the horsehair sofa. "*You shall hear all about it in a minute,*" I continued, "but first of all I want you to tell me whether you got my letter. I mean the one I wrote to you enclosing a lot of papers and notes."

"Oh yes, that came all right. I put the papers away same as you asked. You'll find them upstairs in the drawer of your table."

"Splendid!" I gave a sigh of relief, and, planting myself down beside her, sank back contentedly against the hard cushion. It was such a weight off my mind that for the moment nothing else seemed to matter.

"Fair worried to death, though, I've been at not hearing from you again. What with all these shootings and murders going on over there——"

"You were beginning to think you'd lost a troublesome lodger, eh?" I gave her a reassuring pat. "Well, you haven't, as you can see for yourself. I got a crack on the leg that laid me out for a little while, but apart from that I'm as sound as a bell. I've been hiding away in a friend's cottage waiting for a chance to escape."

"But why ever didn't you write? There's been all sorts of people ringing up and asking about you."

"Couldn't be done. Since the fighting started it's been almost impossible to send a letter out of the country."

"How did you get away yourself?"

"I sneaked off at night in a small rowing boat, and was picked up by a steamer the next day. Fortunately for me she was a British ship, and happened to be bound for the Thames."

"It was the hand of the Lord," declared Mrs. Mudge solemnly. "The hand of the Lord stretched out to pluck you from the deep."

"That's very much how I felt about it myself," I admitted.

"Many's the time I've put up a prayer for you," she went on, "and Mr. Littlewood, our minister, has been doing the same. When I tell him——"

"Ah, that reminds me." I sat up abruptly. "Just for the present I'm particularly anxious that no one should know I'm back. The truth is that I'm absolutely fagged out. Before I start interviewing people I must have a few days' rest, and if it gets around that I've suddenly turned up in London that will be next door to impossible. You see, at the moment everyone's interested in Spain. As likely as not we should have half a dozen reporters rushing down here wanting me to give them a story."

"That would never do." Mrs. Mudge shook her head disapprovingly. "Why, of course I won't say a word to a soul, and, what's more, I'll see that Gertie doesn't go gossiping about, neither."

"Thanks very much," I said. "As a matter of fact, there is one person I shall have to ring up——"

"Would it be the lawyer gentleman?"

"What lawyer gentleman?"

"The one who sent his clerk along here with a letter."

"When was that?" I demanded.

"Must have been a couple of months ago now. Very important he said it was, and if you did happen to let me know your address I was to post it on to you at once."

"Have you still got it?" I asked.

She nodded, and rising from the sofa crossed over to a writing desk opposite. "Headford and Chetwynd," she

announced, "that's the name. It's stamped here on the back of the envelope."

"Chetwynd!" I stretched out my hand. "What on earth can he be writing about?"

With no little curiosity I tore open the flap and pulled out an official-looking screed which I hastily unfolded. Tucked away inside was a cutting from a newspaper. It fluttered down on to the carpet, and without waiting to pick it up I began to read the letter.

"73a, Bedford Row,  
W.C.1.

April 3rd, 1936.

"MY DEAR ALAN,

"Since you appear, temporarily, I hope, to have vanished from human knowledge, I am leaving this letter with your landlady, with instructions that she is to forward it to you directly you enlighten her with regard to your present whereabouts. I trust that your long silence (which, incidentally, is creating a certain uneasiness amongst your University friends) is only to be attributed to the difficulties of communication and does not mean that you have been suffering from illness or getting yourself into trouble with the local authorities. I must confess that in view of the prevailing state of affairs in Spain I shall be distinctly relieved to learn that you are safely out of the country.

"However, to proceed to business. As you will see by the enclosed obituary notice, your cousin, Mr. Melville Reid, of Bracken Hall, Hampstead, passed away suddenly on February 14th, and since then, in my capacity as his executor, I have been attempting to discover some channel through which we might be able to get into contact. Unfortunately these endeavours have so far proved fruitless.

"I have to inform you that under your late cousin's will you occupy the agreeable position of being one of the principal beneficiaries. Since it is more than possible that what I am now writing may go astray, I do not

propose to go into details. For certain reasons, however, I am particularly anxious to discuss the situation, and should my letter come into your hands I trust that you will at once notify me of the fact and make it your business to return to England at your earliest convenience.

"I will only add that my wife joins with me in sending you our kindest regards, and that we are both looking forward to welcoming you home before very long. She says that you must come and dine with us and tell her the full story of your exciting adventures. If, as is probably the case, you are under contract to keep that for your forthcoming book, I can see that I shall be reluctantly compelled to buy a copy and present it to her for Christmas!

"Yours sincerely,

"ROBERT CHETWYND."

A trifle dazed by this totally unexpected news, I stooped down and picked up the cutting. To judge by its headlines it appeared to have been extracted from a local paper.

TRAGIC END OF  
WEALTHY HAMPSTEAD RESIDENT  
MR. REID, OF BRACKEN HALL,  
*FOUND DEAD IN HIS GARDEN*

"We regret to announce that Mr. Melville Reid, who resided in the fine old Queen Anne mansion known as Bracken Hall, was discovered on Tuesday night lying on the lawn at the rear of the house where he had apparently been overtaken by a sudden seizure. A doctor was immediately summoned, but before medical aid could be administered the deceased had already passed away. The funeral service will take place at the Golder's Green Crematorium at three o'clock on Friday.

"The late Mr. Reid, who purchased Bracken Hall on his return to this country some twelve years ago, was a man of

considerable fortune and had spent most of his life in the Far East. Though he took no active part in social or municipal affairs he was a liberal contributor to local charities, and his loss will be deeply regretted by the numerous institutions which have benefited from his generosity. We are informed that Bracken Hall, to which he was extremely attached, is not to be placed upon the market. It will pass into the possession of another member of the same family."

I was just reading the last words when Mrs. Mudge's voice suddenly recalled me to my surroundings.

"Not bad news, I hope, sir?"

For an instant I found her question a trifle difficult to answer.

"It's to tell me that an old cousin of my father's was found dead in his garden about three months ago. He was almost the only near relation I had left."

"Dear me, sir, I'm sorry to hear that. I'm afraid it must have upset you."

"It's not really such a great shock," I explained. "He was over seventy, and we didn't see very much of each other. He lived at Hampstead, and I used to go up there occasionally and have lunch with him."

"Ah well, we must all answer the call when it comes. The only thing that matters is to be properly prepared for it." Mrs. Mudge shook her head darkly and glanced at the clock. "How about my getting you a little supper, sir? I'm sure you must need something after coming off a ship, and with a sudden death in the family right on top of it."

"I'd like to have a wash and a change first," I replied. "I'm too grimy to sit down as I am."

"That will be all right, sir. I've got a nice chop in the larder, and there's a bit of gooseberry tart which I can hot up for you. It will take about twenty minutes, so there's no need for you to hurry."

"Good," I observed. "And perhaps when I'm ready you won't mind if I come in here and use your phone for a minute?"

"You're quite welcome any time." She gave me a friendly nod and moved towards the door. "I'll send Gertie up with a clean towel, and if there's anything else you want you've only got to tell her. You'll find your room all in order, though. I've kept it ready just in case you should happen to turn up unexpected."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mudge," I said. "You're a real Christian, and it's a perfect joy to be back."

It certainly was pleasant to find myself once more in my own comfortable bedroom, from the window of which one could look out over the huddled roofs of Kensington to the distant and reassuring dome of the Albert Hall. What chiefly occupied my mind at the moment, however, was the totally unlooked-for announcement contained in Mr. Chetwynd's letter. That my cousin, Melville, that reserved and rather forbidding old bachelor, should take it into his head to make me one of his principal heirs was a possibility that had never seriously crossed my mind. It was true, of course, that apart from his sister's son, the sleek and objectionable Maurice Trevor, I was the only relative he possessed with whom he appeared to be on speaking terms. Even so, I had always assumed that the bulk of his fortune would be distributed between those particular local charities to which he had so handsomely contributed during his residence in Hampstead. In the course of my visits to Bracken Hall he had never given me the slightest hint of his intentions; indeed it was only because I felt vaguely sorry for him, and because I was really attracted by the fine old house and garden, that on the rare occasions when he had asked me to lunch I had invariably made a point of accepting his invitation. I wondered what had happened to my friend Bates, the butler, whom I could see now hovering benignantlly in the background, waiting for an opportunity to replenish my glass. A good sort, Bates—just the kind of mellow and genial retainer who fitted in perfectly with a Queen Anne setting.

Anyhow, so far as the legacy was concerned, there seemed to be nothing to worry about. With Mr. Chetwynd acting as executor I could rest assured that my interests had not



been allowed to suffer on account of my absence from England. He was not only a first-class lawyer but as a lifelong friend of my father's and a man of transparent integrity and kindness he had always inspired me with a feeling of confidence and affection that had merely increased in strength the more intimately I had come to know him. This opinion of mine appeared to be shared by a large number of other people. His house in Chester Square, where he gave the most delightful dinner parties, was frequented by an amazing collection of influential and entertaining guests. He seemed to know everybody, from Cabinet Ministers to the latest successful film stars. Mrs. Chetwynd, who was as hospitable as her husband, had taken me under her wing as a sort of special and privileged favourite, and ever since I had been connected with the University they had both contributed to making my existence in London vastly more interesting and amusing than would otherwise have been the case.

Indeed, I had a grateful suspicion that Cousin Melville's surprising and unexpected bequest could be largely attributed to the influence of his legal adviser.

At first I felt tempted to ring him up at his private address, but the thought that I should probably be summoning him away from a game of bridge made me decide to put off satisfying my curiosity until the following day. After all, there was no point in rushing things. On the contrary, it would be rather fun to walk into his office without any previous announcement and see the surprise on his face when I was solemnly ushered upstairs. I could almost feel the welcoming grip of his hand and hear the typical gusty laugh with which he would push me down into the big arm-chair that stood beside his table. Yes, that was the proper course to adopt: that would be a heap more satisfactory than attempting to get in touch with him to-night.

Arraying myself in an old suit which I dug out of the wardrobe, I made my way downstairs again and turned into Mrs. Mudge's deserted sanctum. In the back of my watch I was still carrying the little slip of paper which Suzanne had given me at the café. I glanced at it to refresh my memory, and then, sitting down in front of the phone,

dialled out the number. After a brief period of buzzing I was rewarded by a sudden "Hello, who's that?"

"It's Alan Russell speaking," I replied. "Are you Miss Despard?"

"Yes, that is right. I thought I recognised your voice. When did you get back?"

"Came ashore about a couple of hours ago. I've just had a bath and a change, and I'm looking so respectable I hardly know myself. How are you, and when am I going to see you?"

"Oh, I am quite well, thanks. I have been hoping so much that you would ring up. I want to have a talk with you as soon as possible—to-morrow morning if you can manage it."

"Suit me admirably," I agreed.

"Where are you speaking from?"

"My old digs in Campden Hill."

"Then you are fairly close to where I am. You know the first gate into Kensington Gardens, just past Notting Hill Station. Could you meet me there at ten o'clock, or would that be too early?"

"Not a bit," I assured her. "I always bound out of bed somewhere around cockcrow."

"There are a whole lot of things I want to explain," she continued, "and if it is a nice morning we can get a couple of chairs and sit in the Park."

"Do you mean that your offer of a job still holds good?" I enquired.

"Certainly it does. I must find somebody to help me, and it has got to be someone I can really trust. If you're willing to take it on I believe you are exactly the right person."

"Of course I am," I said firmly. "Didn't I tell you that I'd been specially picked out by Providence?"

"Yes, I remember. You had better not make any rash promises, though. When you hear what it is all about you may change your mind."

"It's not likely," I declared. "I have a sort of feeling——"

There was a knock on the door and Gertie's shrill voice broke into our conversation.

"Your supper's ready, sir," she announced.

I heard a little laugh at the other end of the wire. "Then I must not keep you. Good-bye, and I shall expect to see you in the morning."

The telephone gave a faint click, and before I could protest the line had suddenly gone dead.

## CHAPTER IV

MRS. MUDGE stepped back and surveyed the breakfast table with an approving eye. "There you are," she announced. "A nice bit of haddock with a poached egg on it. Feeding up, sir, that's what you want—proper good feeding up and plenty of sleep and rest."

"Well, I haven't begun too badly," I retorted. "I had a solid eight hours last night, and I must confess that I feel all the better for it."

"You're looking a different man, but you'll have to go careful. Take it easy like till you've got back your full strength. You'll be in to lunch and dinner, of course?"

I shook my head. "Not to lunch. I must run up to Bedford Row and see my friend Mr. Chetwynd. There are one or two papers he wants me to sign."

"You be careful you don't over-tire yourself." She paused. "Do you think you could eat a fillet of steak to-night, or perhaps you'd fancy something a bit lighter?"

"I should adore a fillet of steak," I declared. "Nothing to beat it, especially when you've been out of England for some time."

"Used to be my husband's favourite dish, too." She shook her head sadly. "Always had it on a Sunday he did. And I shall never forget what happened the morning after he died. I can't bear to think of it even now. Couldn't look at a piece of undercut, not for nearly a couple of years."

"How was that?" I inquired.

"It was late of a Saturday night when he was took ill, and he passed away about eight o'clock the next day. I'd ordered a couple o' pounds, same as usual, and since it was there in the larder I thought I might as well cook it. When I cut meself a slice, though, it seemed as if the first mouthful would choke me. Come over me in a rush, as you might put it. There I was sitting down eating hot beef and him hardly cold upstairs."

"It must have been a shattering experience," I agreed. "The sort of thing that might destroy one's appetite for ever."

"It was the Lord's will, and I've had much to be thankful for since." Removing the tin cover which had been keeping my haddock hot, Mrs. Mudge retreated to the door. "A beautiful morning," she added encouragingly. "You'll enjoy a bit of a walk, I expect."

"It will be delightful." I picked up the teapot. "I've been looking forward to it ever since I left Bordeaux."

A leisurely breakfast, followed by a cigarette, and a glance at the *Daily Mail* occupied me pleasantly for the next half-hour. By then it was close on a quarter to ten, and since there was just a possibility that Suzanne might be a minute or so early, I decided that the time had arrived to set off for our trysting place. Silly as it may sound, I felt so excited at the prospect of seeing her again that the business about Cousin Melville's will scarcely so much as intruded itself upon my thoughts.

Mrs. Mudge's statement with regard to the beauty of the morning had certainly been no exaggeration. When I stepped outside I found the sun shining down bravely out of a cloudless sky, brightening up the flowers in the newly painted window-boxes, and producing a twittering chorus of gratitude from a swarm of appreciative sparrows. Even the people I passed in the street seemed to look more cheerful than usual. One stout gentleman, carrying his hat in his hand, was actually humming Mendelssohn's Spring Song, and wondering whether he, too, was on his way to some agreeable assignation, I descended the short slope and swung round in the direction of the Park.

As I approached the gate which led into Kensington Gardens I discovered that my old acquaintances, the man who sold balloons and the lady who dealt in slabs of chocolate, were still plying their trade. Nothing appeared to have changed during my absence from home, and sauntering on to within a few yards of the entrance, I pulled up with my back to the railings and began to look around in search of Suzanne.

I spotted her almost immediately. She had just emerged out of a side turning a little farther along the road, and at the sight of her slim, white-clad figure my heart gave such an absurd jump that I as nearly as possible plunged forward in front of an onrushing taxi. Before I had really recovered myself she had crossed over and was coming quickly towards me.

"Do not tell me I am late. I thought I should be here first."

"You're absolutely punctual," I assured her. "When I'm interviewing a prospective employer I always make a point of being a minute or two early. It creates a favourable impression."

She laughed. "You know I hardly recognised you for a moment. You look quite different from when I saw you last."

"I've had a hot bath," I explained. "That would probably account for it."

"Well, it evidently suits you. No one could mistake you for a tramp now." She looked me up and down with apparent approval. "Suppose we go inside and find ourselves a couple of chairs? You are not in any hurry, are you?"

"I have the whole day at my disposal," I announced. "I told my landlady that I shouldn't be back till dinner-time."

"I hope it will not take as long as that." She laughed again, and, turning in at the gate, we made our way past the children's playground and struck off across the grass. There were numerous deck-chairs scattered about under the trees, and, moved by a kind of tacit understanding, we headed for a shady spot some little distance from the

nearest path. The only other person in the neighbourhood was a harmless-looking old lady who was knitting placidly at a jumper.

"I'm simply chock full of curiosity," I observed, as I took my seat beside her. "I've been trying to imagine any way in which I could be of use to you, and the only answer I can think of is that you might want me to punch somebody's head."

"It is queer you should say that." Her wide-set hazel eyes were studying me gravely. "I do not know how you got the idea, but, all the same, it is not so very far from the truth. I am not absolutely sure yet, but if things turn out as I expect they will I shall certainly need someone who can hit a man hard enough to prevent him from interfering with what I have got to do. When you saved me from being robbed at Bordeaux and I saw how strong and brave you were——"

"You mustn't jump to conclusions," I interrupted. "I had just had a good dinner and I was feeling bang on top of the world. Besides, it's ridiculously easy to trip anyone up."

She shook her head. "I believe in trusting to my own judgment. I have been thinking it all over very carefully, and if you are ready to accept my offer after you have heard what I am going to tell you I can only say that I shall look upon myself as being extremely fortunate."

"That's very charming of you. If it wasn't for the old lady over there I would get up and bow." I paused. "This is most exciting," I added. "I feel as if I were sitting in a theatre waiting for the curtain to go up."

"There's such a lot to explain I hardly know where to begin." She knitted her forehead. "Perhaps I had better start by telling you something more about myself."

"An admirable idea."

"My mother was French. She lived at Chartres, and her name was Lucille Dubois. She was only eighteen when she met my father. He was an English artist, and he was over there painting a picture of the cathedral. They fell in love with each other at first sight, and when her parents

refused their consent she ran away with him and got married in London. They were very angry, and for some time they would not have anything to do with her. It was only after I was born that they came round and made it up."

"I'm not surprised," I observed. "You must have been a delightful baby."

"I was very ugly, as a matter of fact. I have got a miniature of myself done by my father. I look rather like a monkey."

"He ought to have stuck to cathedrals," I remarked. "They were evidently more in his line."

"Poor Daddy!" she smiled sadly. "He did not live long enough to see how much I improved. He was killed in a motor accident while I was still too young to remember him."

"What shocking bad luck."

"Yes, it was a terrible blow for my mother. I do not think she ever really recovered from it. We went to live at Chartres with my grandfather and grandmother, and when I was thirteen she and granny both died within a few months of each other. Then some relations of my father, who had a business in Bristol, offered to give me a home, and I stayed with them until I grew up and became a professional singer. I studied in Paris for two years, and while I was in France I used to go and pay visits to my grandfather. He had left Chartres and taken a house in Bordeaux. It was there that he was murdered."

"Murdered?" I sat up abruptly.

"He was found lying in bed with his throat cut. He had a valuable collection of precious stones which he kept in the house, and during the night somebody broke in and stole the whole lot of them. I suppose he woke up while they were doing it, and they killed him so that he should not give the alarm."

"Was he all alone? Was there no one else living with him?"

"Only his housekeeper, a woman called Marie Péchin. Her room was upstairs, and when the police questioned her

she swore she had been asleep all night, and that she had not heard a sound. They kept her in custody for some time, but they could not find any evidence against her, and in the end they had to let her go."

"And nobody was ever arrested for it?"

"Nobody. It has always remained an absolute mystery. They thought they might be able to trace the man when he tried to sell the stones. There was a cross made of emeralds which had once belonged to Madame Rachel, the actress. They were cut in a rather unusual way, and any good jeweller in the world would probably have recognized them. They have never come on the market, though. I expect the man who stole them thought it was too risky, and that he was content with what he could get for the rest of the stuff. That was valued at between six and seven thousand pounds, and the cross was worth at least as much again. My grandfather had spent a good deal of his capital buying them. What was left—just the house and about three hundred a year—all came to me."

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"Four years ago, almost exactly. The French police seemed to have dropped the case entirely. I thought I should never hear anything more about it, and then last week, after I had given up all hope, I had a letter from the matron of a small private hospital at Bordeaux. She asked me to go over there and see a woman patient who was anxious to make a statement before she died. The woman's name was Péchin—Marie Péchin."

"Your grandfather's housekeeper."

She nodded. "I went by plane, and got there just in time. Marie was so ill that she could barely speak. The doctor was examining her when I arrived, and he stopped in the room with us. She knew she was dying, and she wanted to tell me the truth before it was too late."

"You mean she had committed the murder herself?"

"No. I had never suspected her of that. She was fond of my grandfather, and he had been very kind to her." Suzanne paused, and then, leaning forward, lowered her voice. "But she knew who had done it. She had known that all



along. The reason she had refused to speak was because the man was her lover."

"Who was the swine?" I demanded.

"He was an Englishman who was employed at a racing stable. He called himself Robert Norton. He had been in France for some time, and he spoke the language as well as he did English. He was younger than Marie, and when he started making up to her she fell hopelessly in love with him, and became his mistress. Of course she was careful to keep it all secret from my grandfather. Norton told her that he was getting a divorce from his wife in order to marry her, and that if anything came out the whole business would fall through. She gave him a key to the back door so that there was no need for him to knock or ring. That was how he got in on the night of the murder."

"Did she actually see him in the house?"

"Not according to her own story. She swore she was asleep upstairs exactly as she told the police."

"Then how could she be certain?"

Suzanne shrugged. "He disappeared the next day, and she never heard of him again. Nor did anyone else in Bordeaux, apparently."

"You learned all this the evening I met you?"

"Yes. I had just come out of the hospital when that brute snatched my bag and knocked me down."

"But didn't you go to the police before you left?"

She shook her head. "Marie died almost immediately after she had finished making her statement. There was no time to write it down, and in any case she would have been too weak to have signed it."

"How about the doctor? Didn't you say he was in the room as well?"

"I talked it over with him, and he advised me not to take any further steps until I was able to produce some more evidence. He said that Marie was half delirious, and that quite probably it was all nonsense. He suggested that I should get in touch with a firm of private detectives and arrange with them to make a full inquiry. If they could prove that such a man as Robert Norton really existed he

would be prepared to come forward and support my story. I believe he thought that it might mean a lot of trouble for him, and that he did not want to be mixed up with it."

"But that's preposterous," I objected. "You surely don't intend——"

"Listen!" She laid her hand on my arm. "I have not told you everything yet." She paused. "Marie gave me a description of the man. I may be wrong, but I am almost sure that he is living in London, and that I have actually met him."

I whistled softly. "By Jove, that does alter things. Who is he, and where did you come across him?"

"At a night-club, a place called The Merry Andrew. He is a bookmaker, and he has a house in St. John's Wood. Some friends of mine introduced him to me, and we all went on there to a supper party. Next time I saw him he asked me if I would come again another night by myself. I was not very polite to him, but he is the sort of beast who can take a lot of snubbing. His name is Grantley—Vincent Grantley—at least that is what he is calling himself at present."

"What makes you think he's the same man? It's not easy to recognize people merely from a description. Is there anything peculiar about him?"

"Yes, there are two points Marie mentioned specially. He has a white scar at the corner of his forehead, and the lobe of one of his ears is a good deal longer than the other."

"Sounds fairly convincing." I stared at her for a moment in silence. "What do you intend to do about it, and where am I supposed to come in?"

"I must find some proof that he is Robert Norton, and my only chance is to get into the house and have a search through his private papers. There is a safe in his study—I noticed it when I went there to supper. I am quite sure that if I pretended to change my mind and promised to go back with him he would make arrangements to send his servant out for the night, so that we could be alone in the house. I should insist on that, naturally. Then I thought that if you could manage to break in first and be waiting for us, you

could jump out suddenly and knock him down. After that we could tie him up and look through the safe. It is almost certain that he would carry the key about with him." She glanced at me anxiously. "I knew it would be a tremendous lot to ask of anybody, but——"

For the life of me I couldn't help laughing. "It's a gorgeous idea," I exclaimed. "So simple and so beautifully direct. In cases of this sort people generally try to be too damned subtle."

"Do you mean that? Do you really mean that I can count upon your help?"

She looked so charming with her parted lips and shining eyes that all thoughts about my own safety and convenience were abruptly swept aside. At that moment I would cheerfully have promised her anything.

"If you've brought the contract with you," I said, "I'll sign it straight away."

"Oh, that is splendid. I can't tell you what a relief it is. I have been so afraid that when you heard my story you would probably want to back out."

A sudden inspiration flashed across my mind, and tossing away the stump of my cigarette, I drew my chair a shade closer.

"Look here, Suzanne," I began. Then I paused. "I suppose I ought to call you Miss Despard as you're my employer."

"Nonsense. What were you going to say?"

"I've got an idea. I've just thought of it. I know a man who may be able to put us wise about Mr. Vincent Grantley."

"Who is he?" she demanded.

"His name is Tubby Green. He used to be a jockey, but he got into trouble and lost his licence. I believe he was actually in quod for a short time. Now he's a racecourse tipster."

"He is a friend of yours?"

"Very much so. He once had the pleasure of saving him from being kicked to death."

"By a horse?" she inquired.

I shook my head. "No, by some gentlemen who are known as the Molini Gang. Three or four of them had cornered him in a side street off Shepherd's Bush, and they were just getting to work. I happened to be passing, so I butted in and gave him a hand."

"Yes, that is exactly what you would do." She laughed softly. "And your poor friend—was he much hurt?"

"He'd been a bit knocked about. I thought a drop of something would do him good, and as the pubs were all shut I took him along to my rooms and fed him up with whisky. He was by way of being rather grateful, and ever since then he has been trying to pay me back by sending me free tips. Two or three of them have actually come off."

"But why should he know anything about Grantley?"

"He is pretty well in with all the crooks on the turf; you have to be in a job like his. If this chap's a bookie, and a wrong 'un on top of it, Tubby's dead sure to have run across him. He can at least tell us how long the blighter has been in business, and what sort of a crowd he's mixed up with."

"That might be useful, yes. Do you think you can get in touch with him?"

"Ought to be quite easy. I'll find out when the next race meeting is, and if there's one on this week I'll trot down there and have a look round. Tubby is sure to be functioning, especially if it's anywhere near Town."

"Thank you." She looked up gratefully. "And while you are doing that I will go and see those people who took me to the house. I may be able to get something out of them."

"You had better watch your step," I said warningly. "If I'm to break into the house, knock Grantley out, and burgle his safe, it mustn't look like a put-up job between us. We don't want to have anyone going to the police and telling them that you'd been making inquiries about him beforehand."

"You need not worry; I promise you I will be very tactful. Perhaps you will ring me up on Wednesday morning and let me know how you have got on. Then if either of us has found out anything fresh we can meet again and talk it over."

"Wednesday at nine," I agreed. "What do you say to our lunching together? We still have quite a lot of preliminary staff work to get through, and I can always think better when I'm eating. We might run down into the country and feed at some nice quiet little pub."

"I would like to, as long as you allow me to pay." She paused. "And while we are speaking of paying, I think we should fix up some definite agreement now. I—I was wondering whether you would consider a hundred pounds a fair amount. I would give you that gladly, and if——"

"Good Lord, that reminds me! I've been so absorbed listening to you that I've quite forgotten to pass on my own glad tidings. What do you think? When I got back I found a letter from a lawyer telling me that an old cousin of mine had left me some money."

"Oh, I am so pleased to hear that. Do you know how much it is?"

"Not yet; I am going up there to-day to make inquiries. Anyhow, it will probably be enough to carry on with until I've written those articles, so you must keep that hundred quid tucked away in your bank. If I take on this little job it's got to be as an amateur."

"But I could not let you do that; I've no right to expect it. Why should you risk getting into trouble just to help a complete stranger?"

"You're not a stranger," I objected. "I've known you all my life. I was always quite certain that you were floating about just round the corner, but until last Sunday I never had the good luck to catch up with you. That's why I'm so grateful to the bloke who pinched your bag."

"You can't be more grateful to him than I am." She laughed again, and an attractive little tinge of colour crept into her face. "He—he hardly looked like it, but I have a sort of feeling that he must be my guardian angel. I hope you did not hurt him when you tripped him up."

"May have dented his halo a trifle; if so, I don't suppose it matters. I believe that nowadays all guardian angels are insured against accidents." As I spoke I heard the creak of footsteps and, glancing round, I saw an elderly man with

an armlet on his sleeve advancing leisurely from the neighbouring path. Pulling up in front of us with a slightly apologetic air, he produced a roll of tickets.

"Fourpence, please, sir," he remarked.

"A lovely morning," I observed, fumbling in my pocket.

"You're right, sir. Makes one glad to be alive, a day like this."

"That seems to sum it up." I handed him a shilling. "Here you are," I added. "You can keep the change for expressing it so happily."

With a grin and a mumbled word of thanks he shuffled off in the direction of the old lady, and waiting until he was out of earshot Suzanne shook her head reprovingly.

"You are terribly extravagant. Your money will soon vanish if you throw it about like that."

"I'll be careful to keep enough for Wednesday," I assured her. "By the way, why shouldn't we lunch to-day as well? After all. . . ."

"I can't, I'm afraid. I have promised to try over a new song with the composer, and he is coming round to my place at a quarter to eleven." She consulted her watch. "I ought to be starting back now, as a matter of fact."

"What's the song," I inquired, "and where are you going to sing it?"

"Oh, it is just one of those stupid little crooning things that are the rage at present. I thought of trying it out at The Merry Andrew. They have asked me to do something there on Thursday."

"I'd love to hear you," I said. "Couldn't you fix it up for me somehow?"

"Perhaps I will. It all depends on what happens the next two days." She got up from her chair. "We can walk along as far as the gate, and then I think you had better leave me. As you said just now, we ought not to be seen about together or it might put ideas into somebody's head."

Strolling in silence across the grass, we made our way back to the entrance, where, under the sympathetic eye of the balloon merchant, I stood for a moment holding the neatly-gloved little hand which she made no attempt to withdraw.

I found myself battling against an insane impulse to pick her up in my arms and kiss her.

"Where do you actually live?" I managed to jerk out.

"A place called Ockfield Court—down that next street and round to the left. It is only a tiny flat, just a sitting-room and a bedroom. I will invite you to come and see it one day if—if everything goes well."

"That will be an immense encouragement." With extreme reluctance I let go her hand. "Wednesday then," I repeated. "Wednesday at nine sharp, and let's hope that one or other of us will have had some luck."

"Of course we shall," she said simply. "It could never have happened like this unless it had all been specially arranged."

Not until she had crossed the road and disappeared from sight did I suddenly become aware of a raucous voice making itself audible above the rumble of the traffic.

"All the runners! Speshul 'dition!" "All the runners!"

The thought of Tubby Green flashed across my mind, and, stopping the perspiring newsvendor, I purchased a *Star* and stepped back against the railings. The whole of the front sheet was devoted to the day's sport at Manchester, but on turning to the back page I discovered a half column of prophetic gossip the heading of which immediately arrested my eye. It was entitled:

#### COMING EVENTS.

##### *To-morrow's Meeting at Hurst Park.*

"You were right, Suzanne," I said to myself. "It couldn't have happened like this unless it had all been specially arranged!"

#### II

Making my way up the narrow passage alongside Gray's Inn, I passed through the open gate at the top and came out into the pleasant Georgian atmosphere of Bedford Row. The firm of Headford and Chetwynd occupied a fine old

house on the south side of the street. Built originally as the Town residence of some wealthy City merchant, it still retained that combined air of dignity and charm, the secret of which, by some regrettable oversight, appears to have been buried with the architects of the period.

I had visited these attractive premises on several occasions, but it was with an altogether novel thrill that I now pushed open the inner door and stepped through into the dark, oak-panelled passage from which a stately staircase wound up to the landing above. On my right was a room labelled "Inquiries." It was a small apartment, divided down the centre by a high railed desk, behind which sat a sharp-featured, intelligent-faced youth, who glanced up as I made my appearance.

"Yes, sir?" he observed crisply. "Anything I can do for you?"

"There is," I replied. "You can inform Mr. Chetwynd that Mr. Alan Reid would like to have a chat with him."

"Mr. Alan Reid!" He stared at me with a suddenly awakened interest. "Excuse my asking, sir, but did you receive a letter which was left for you at your Campden Hill address?"

I nodded. "My landlady gave it me last night. Thought I'd better answer it in person."

"Well, it will be a nice surprise for Mr. Chetwynd." An anticipatory grin flickered across his face. "If you'll take a seat for a moment I'll run up and tell him you're here."

Hastening round the end of the desk, he headed for the staircase, and after a very short interval came clattering down again and reappeared in the doorway.

"If you come this way, sir, he'll see you at once."

As I entered the large, sombrely-furnished room on the first floor, Mr. Chetwynd, who had apparently just risen from the big table at which he had been seated, stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"I might have known it," he exclaimed. "I might have guessed that you would burst in like this without a shadow of warning." He pumped my arm up and down vigorously. "I am delighted to see you, though, my boy, more delighted



and relieved than I can say. I had begun to think that you were either dead and buried or else rotting away in some filthy Spanish gaol. Where have you been all this time, and why the devil haven't you written to any of your friends?"

"That's just what I've come to explain. You shall have the whole story if you're not too busy." I waited until the door had closed, and then released myself from his grip. "I only arrived home late last night," I continued, "and I didn't like to ring you up in case you were in the middle of a rubber."

"Sit down, you young scoundrel. Plant yourself in that chair and I'll see whether I can find you a cigar. Not that you deserve one after all the trouble and anxiety you've been giving me." With a characteristic chuckle he produced a box of mellow-looking Upmans, and having offered it to me selected one for himself. Then, pushing across the matches, he resumed his seat at the big, untidy table.

"How about that letter I sent to your rooms?" he demanded. "You have read it, I suppose?"

I nodded. "It knocked me all of a heap. I thought the old boy might leave me an odd hundred, but I never expected anything more than that. What do you mean when you talk about my being one of his 'principal beneficiaries'?"

"We'll discuss the matter later." His eyes twinkled. "First of all I want to know what you've been up to. I don't mind telling you that your revered President, of whom I have been making inquiries, is distinctly upset. Unless you have a good excuse to offer him, I gather that you can look forward to a rather chilly reception. I was informed that your 'prolonged and inexplicable silence was beginning to arouse the gravest concern.'"

"I was afraid it might be." I smiled ruefully. "To be absolutely candid," I continued, "I've got myself into a bit of a jam. I've an idea that I can wriggle out of it successfully, but that remains to be seen. What I'd like to do, if I may, is to inflict the whole business on you and enjoy the benefit of your sagacious counsel. I'm afraid it's going to take a hell of a time, though."

"Never mind that. If any of my other clients' affairs are neglected they will have to accept the situation with Christian fortitude." He chuckled again. "Go ahead, my boy, go ahead. Unless I return home with a full account of your adventures Heaven knows what my wife will have to say to me. She has been worried to death over your mysterious disappearance."

"Please give her my love," I said guiltily. "I——"

"You get on with your story; that's the important thing at the moment."

Obedying his instructions, I set about my task without further delay. As briefly as possible I described the kindness which I had received from the Basques, and the mingled feelings of gratitude and sympathy which had induced me to enlist in their cause. I gave him a short account of my experiences at the front, and of how I had succeeded in getting out of the country, and then, passing on to my rescue by the *Emily Hart* and our arrival in the Thames, I wound up my narrative by a frank confession of my illegal understanding with Captain Ellis which had enabled me to slip ashore in so convenient and inconspicuous a fashion. On one point alone I preserved a discreet reticence. Of my evening in Bordeaux and my encounter with Suzanne I said absolutely nothing.

"That's the position at the moment," I concluded. "And, as you can see for yourself, it's what one might describe as being a trifle delicate. I don't imagine that I am really in much danger of being arrested. As long as I keep quiet there's no earthly reason why the police should connect me with the chap they're looking for, and, in any case, after a few weeks the whole thing will probably be shelved and forgotten. Then I can toddle along to old Ingram with a nice, convincing yarn of my own and——"

"Just one moment while I recover my breath." Mr. Chetwynd tipped off the ash of his cigar and, leaning back, surveyed me quizzically from under his tufted eyebrows. "I suppose it hasn't entered your head that you are asking me to compound a felony?"

"Of course not." I tried to look shocked. "I haven't

told you anything officially; I've merely been talking to myself. The only reason I came here was to discuss Cousin Melville's will."

"Let me get this perfectly straight." There was a shrewd gleam in my companion's eyes which made me feel a trifle uncomfortable. "You propose to conceal the real facts of your escape and to—how shall we put it?—to remain in obscurity for an unstated period in order that your explanation to the University authorities may stand a better chance of being favourably received. Hm! Now, strictly between ourselves, is that your only reason?"

I paused for an instant. "No," I admitted. "The fact is that I've got a little private job on hand which I am particularly anxious to see through before I start off on anything else."

"I thought as much," He nodded. "Some interesting but slightly disreputable affair which you would prefer to keep to yourself, I presume?"

"That," I said, "depends on one's point of view. When it's a question of ethics I always rely upon my own conscience."

"I am surprised you are still at liberty." He stroked his nose thoughtfully, and then, with a humorous shrug, pushed back his chair. "Well, I won't press you to divulge your immoral secrets, but if you should happen to be contemplating some fresh breach of the law merely for your own personal amusement you may possibly be influenced by what I am about to tell you. As you will perceive for yourself, it would be a singularly inappropriate time in which to become involved in any avoidable scandal."

"I am always open to conviction," I said. "Let me know how the land lies and we'll see what we can do about it."

"You can read the will if you wish to, but there is really no necessity. I can give you the facts as far as they concern you personally. The value of the estate, after the payment of death duties, amounts roughly to a hundred and fifty thousand. There are large bequests to charity, and the residue is divided into two legacies, one to yourself and the

other to your cousin, Maurice Trevor. You are to inherit Bracken Hall and a sufficient amount of capital to bring you in three thousand a year. Trevor gets the remainder, which looks like being about eight thousand. There is a clause to the effect that in the event of the death of either of you before that of the testator the whole of the capital involved should pass to the survivor. It was inserted on the instructions of Mr. Reid in order that he might save himself the possible trouble and expense of having to make a fresh will. At least that was the explanation which he offered to me."

"Well, well, well," I observed, "this is an absolute earthquake! As I told you just now, I thought I might perhaps click for a modest hundred, but I never dreamed that I should suddenly blossom out as a bloated capitalist." I began to laugh. "How did that squirt Maurice take it? He must be as mad as a wet hen."

"Madder." Mr. Chetwynd smiled blandly. "Considerably madder. During the whole of my professional experience I have never seen envy and chagrin more unblushingly displayed."

"I expect he'd like to murder me if he dared."

"I have no doubt it would afford him the acutest satisfaction. From his point of view, however, there is the grave objection that it would be a little too late in the day. If your removal were to be of any pecuniary benefit it should have taken place before the 15th of February."

"I suppose he's clinging to a desperate hope that I have been wiped out in Spain?"

"He is not only clinging to it—he and that unctuous rogue, Stillwall, whom he is employing as a solicitor, have been moving Heaven and earth to secure the necessary evidence. By the way, I believe I have one of their precious advertisements here."

Pulling open a drawer in front of him and rummaging amongst its contents, he produced a printed paragraph which, to judge by its general aspect, appeared to have been cut out of the continental edition of the *Daily Mail*. It ran as follows:

## "MR ALAN REID

"If anyone who is in a position to give evidence with regard to the fate of the above (believed to have been recently killed in Spain) will communicate with Mr. James Stillwall, 6, Chapel Street, Gray's Inn Road, W.C., he will be handsomely remunerated for the trouble and expense involved."

"I wonder how much that cost them?" I laughed again, and handed it back. "I like to think of them sitting round hopefully waiting for an answer."

"Yes, it's an agreeable picture." Very deliberately Mr. Chetwynd laid down the stump of his cigar. "Oddly enough, they appear to have had an answer."

"What?" I stiffened automatically.

"Two days ago I was officially notified that they have filed a petition to presume death, and are instituting proceedings in the High Court. They claim to have evidence establishing the fact that you were killed in action on a date preceding the decease of the testator. Now, perhaps, you can understand why your sudden appearance in the office has relieved me of a considerable amount of anxiety."

"But what's their idea?" I demanded. "They can't get away with a ramp like that."

"I can think of two possible explanations. Some enterprising rascal may have read their advertisement and come forward with a faked story, or else"—he paused—"or else we are up against an impudent and deliberate fraud which I shall consider it my duty and pleasure to expose in the right quarter. From what I have seen of your cousin, and from what I know about Mr. James Stillwall's professional antecedents, the latter alternative seems to me the more probable of the two."

"Do you happen to know who this precious witness of theirs is?"

"That is a matter which at present they are under no obligation to disclose." Once again he ran his finger medita-

tively up and down his nose. "Strictly between ourselves, however, I am not without hope that some enlightenment upon that rather important point will shortly come into my possession."

"It would be interesting if you could find out," I remarked, "but how on earth can you work it?"

"When dealing with people like Stillwall," he replied, "it is sometimes necessary to employ methods which one would not countenance in the case of a more reputable firm. You may have noticed that that young clerk of mine, Ferris, who brought you upstairs, is a youth of exceptional intelligence and acumen."

"He looks as if he knew his way about," I agreed.

"One of his principal assets is a capacity for making useful acquaintances. It has come to my knowledge that he is on friendly terms with one of the junior employees in Stillwall's office. Without entering upon unnecessary details, I fancy that with a little diplomatic handling this intimacy might be profitably exploited. I take it that you have no objection to spending a few pounds in the acquisition of what might turn out to be extremely helpful information?"

"You can be as lavish as you like," I said with a grin. "After all, how can we use money any better than in the service of truth and justice?"

"An admirable sentiment." Mr. Chetwynd smiled benevolently. "If we should be fortunate enough to ascertain the identity of the gentleman in question I shall be very pleased to satisfy your natural curiosity. In the meantime I assume you wish us to act as your legal representatives?"

"If I'm not being too much of a nuisance."

"No client with three thousand a year could ever come within that category." He paused. "And while we are on the subject of money, how are you situated with regard to funds?"

"Things are a trifle cramped at the moment," I admitted. "I believe I've got a little in my account, but I don't want to start drawing on that, or it might get around that I'm back in London."

"There is no reason why you should suffer any unnecessary

privations. If you would like to have fifty pounds to go on with I expect that we can produce it in the office."

"It would be most acceptable," I said gratefully. "You see, there's just a chance that this little business I've got on hand——"

"So you still intend to carry on with that? I was hoping that your new responsibilities as a man of fortune——"

"I can't back out now without breaking my word," I interrupted. "There's nothing to be worried about, though. It only means that I must lie low for a fortnight, and in any case I think it would be wiser to do that on account of the police. As far as Cousin Maurice and that blighter Stillwall are concerned it doesn't seem to matter a damn. Let them go ahead with their action. I wonder how they'll like it when I pop up in court and confront their star witness."

"It would certainly be entertaining to watch their reactions. I hardly imagine they would go so far as to dispute your identity." Leaning forward across the table Mr. Chetwynd pressed a bell, which was answered almost immediately by a severe-looking young woman in spectacles. "I want fifty pounds, Miss Merrill," he announced briskly, "and I think it had better be in one-pound notes. If we haven't that amount on the premises ask Mr. Williams to write a cheque and send someone round to the bank. Let me have it as soon as possible."

Without comment the young lady retired, and taking out his watch my companion glanced at the time. "I am afraid I shall have to be leaving almost directly. I am lunching with my friend Warren, one of the Assistant Commissioners, and as a solicitor I can't afford to keep a highly-placed policeman waiting for his meals." He got up and patted me paternally on the shoulder. "Well, apart from this mysterious business of yours of which I strongly disapprove, everything appears to be comparatively straight sailing. It will be at least three weeks before Stillwall's petition comes before the Court, so that will give us plenty of time to pursue our own line of inquiries. In the meanwhile don't do anything too utterly idiotic, and if you should happen to find yourself in any fresh trouble get on to the telephone and ring me up here.

As things are I can't very well inform my wife that you are back in England, but as soon as you make your official reappearance you must come to dinner and tell her all about it. Being, like most women, completely deficient in any respect for the Law, I have no doubt that she will sympathise with you whole-heartedly."

"Women are wonderful," I observed. "They always seem to go straight for the point that really matters."

"Wait till you are married," returned Mr. Chetwynd dryly. "Then you will discover what an extremely awkward gift Providence has endowed them with."

## CHAPTER V

"URST PARK?" repeated the porter. "Over there on the left. Take a ticket for 'Ampton Court.'"

He nodded towards an array of people drawn up in front of a booking office, and making my way across the congested station I fell in at the tail of the queue.

As I took my place I was joined by a gaunt-looking stranger in a black bowler hat encircled by an unusually broad ribbon. He was a sallow-faced man of about fifty, with a straggling walrus moustache to which a fragment of what appeared to have been an egg sandwich was still precariously clinging. In ranging up alongside me he trod on my foot.

"Beg pardon," he observed, apologetically. "Bit short-sighted I am, that's the trouble."

"No harm done," I assured him.

"Clumsy of me, all the same." He sucked successfully at the evasive remnant. "Goin' to the races, I suppose, same as myself?"

"That's the idea," I admitted.

"Ah, well, there's worse ways of spending a holiday. Mind you, I ain't a betting man—just 'ave a half-crown on now and then when something takes me fancy—no, it's the sport I go for—'the sport o' Kings', that's what my old father used to call it."



"A very apt and original phrase," I remarked.

"Rare one for the 'orses he was. Never missed a Durby for over forty years. What's good enough for Crowned 'Eads is good enough for me, that's how he used to put it, and I reckon, in a manner of speakin', I must have got it in me blood."

Since there was no chance of escaping I tried to be polite. "You attend a lot of meetings," I suggested.

"Too busy," he replied regretfully. "Greengrocery, that's my line—got a nice little business up Highgate way, and what with buying the stuff and keeping an eye on the shop—well, I don't get much time to go traipsin' around to race-courses. 'Ave to grab a chance when it comes along, see?"

"You've grabbed a promising one this morning, anyhow," I commented. "Looks as if we are in for a real scorcher."

"That's a fact. Be a big crowd there, I reckon. What we'd best do is to get right up to the front of the train and find an empty carriage. There'll be gangs of 'em bargain' in at the last minute, and if you're down this end as like as not you'll have some fat bloke standing on your foot. I know the ropes. You stick to me and I'll get you there comfortable."

Not wishing to hurt his feelings, I gave an assenting nod, and shuffling forward by slow steps we at length arrived at the booking office. At this point we became temporarily separated, but when I had secured my ticket and emerged successfully from the throng it was only to discover my garrulous acquaintance waiting for me at the barrier.

"Right up behind the engine," he commanded, "that's our mark. Shan't be starting for another ten minutes, and some of 'em will be packed so tight by then they'll be pretty near suffocated. Why, I been in carriages that jammed you couldn't hardly spit on the floor."

Without waiting for a reply he led the way along the platform until we arrived at the last compartment, and jerking open the door with an air of triumph took possession of a corner seat. As I established myself opposite he pro-

duced a black-bordered handkerchief and, removing his bowler hat, mopped his forehead.

"Bit sultry, as you said, sir; but, come to that, it's only what I was expectin'." He ran a stubby finger round the inside of his collar. "Like the late King George, I am—always seem to get fine weather for me birthday."

"Your birthday, is it?" I lit a cigarette and offered him the packet. "Many happy returns, and I hope you have a lucky year."

"Thank you, mister. I hope so, too. Can't be much worse than the last, that's one comfort, anyway."

"What was the trouble?" I enquired.

"More a question o' what wasn't." He shook his head gloomily. "First thing that happened was losin' me wife. Got some sorter growth in her brain she did, and popped off while they was messing around with her in the 'orspital."

I endeavoured to appear sympathetic. "I am sorry," I said, a trifle lamely. "It must have been a terrible shock for you."

"Reg'lar kick in the pants. You see, it wasn't as if we was what you might call a nordinary married couple. One o' the right sort she was—more like a pal than a wife, if you take my meanin'. Didn't know which way to turn at first, what with the business to run and two brats to look after. Then in August her sister came down from Liverpool to lend me a hand. Nice a woman as you'd find in a day's march. And what does she do no sooner'n she arrives than step right in front of a blinkin' bus and get herself runned over. Wasn't the end neither. Hang me if six weeks later my old father-in-law didn't go and peg out. That was different, o' course. Won't say it upset me as bad as the other two; still, it do keep one 'anging about the churchyard, don't it?"

I was searching in vain for an appropriate reply when the door of the carriage was suddenly wrenched open. A vociferous party, consisting of three sprightly young women with their attendant swains, pushed their way unceremoniously between us. Laughing and chattering, they distributed themselves freely along the two seats, and taking advantage of their timely irruption I unfolded the *Sporting Times*,

which I had bought at the bookstall, and retired discreetly behind its pages. I had a feeling that unless I could shake off my new acquaintance before we got on the course my search for Tubby Green was likely to be seriously handicapped.

The clamour kept up by the fresh arrivals was fortunately so insistent that it appeared to discourage him from further efforts at conversation. I had little doubt, however, that he was merely biding his time, and that if I wished to avoid being saddled with his company for the rest of the afternoon my only chance was to slip away hastily the very instant we pulled up at our destination.

Accordingly, when the train slithered into Hampton Court Station and came to halt, I had my plan of campaign fully matured. Before my afflicted friend could even so much as recover his hat I had slid back the catch and kicked open the door. The next moment I was out on the platform. Almost simultaneously a stream of humanity began to emerge from the adjacent carriages, and edging my way in among the thick of the crowd I allowed myself to be carried forward unresistingly through the narrow and congested exit.

In the roadway outside stood a procession of empty taxis, from the drivers of which issued the clamorous exhortation: "'Ere you are, gents! No waitin'. A bob a nob! All the way to the course." Somehow or other I found myself being hustled into a vehicle where three other passengers were already seated, and by the time I had recovered my breath we were bowling jerkily along what appeared to be the bank of the Thames amid a blare of horns and a running fire of Cockney witticisms.

On reaching our destination, where a number of private cars were drawn up outside the entrance, I handed the driver my "bob," and filed in through the busily-clicking turnstile. There was about three-quarters of an hour to go before the first race, but already a large concourse of early arrivals were strolling about between the white railings, while here and there a coloured umbrella and the raucous shout of a bookie showed that, despite all the efforts of our

legislators, a regrettable affection for gambling still lingered obstinately in the soul of the British public. Reassured by this discovery, I purchased an official race card.

I knew that if Tubby were out on business he must be somewhere close at hand. The best chance of finding him was to explore both sides of the course, so, pulling my hat well down and dodging in among the crowd, I started off on a circular tour which would embrace the whole immediate neighbourhood. The one thing I dreaded was the possibility of stumbling up against some old acquaintance and being suddenly recognised and accosted. In a mixed gathering like this it was precisely the sort of contretemps that was most likely to occur.

I was prowling along cautiously, keeping my eyes wide open, when I suddenly caught a glimpse of a small figure in a loud check suit and a broad-brimmed panama hat. At the same moment an exultant thrill went racing through my heart. It was Tubby, beyond any shadow of doubt. He was standing close to the rails engaged in earnest conversation with a white-faced, unhealthy-looking youth of about twenty-one, who, to judge by his attentive and almost obsequious attitude, was apparently being given a series of instructions. The two of them were so absorbed in their conversation that they seemed to be taking no notice of anybody or anything.

I advanced deliberately until I was only a few paces away, and then pulling up proceeded to light a cigarette. Just as I struck the match Tubby raised his eyes. As they fell on me a grin of astonished delight flashed across his face, and unceremoniously thrusting aside his companion he strode forward and grabbed hold of my hand.

"Why, chase me round the sundial if it ain't me old pal the Professor! Gorluvvus, wot a surprise, eh! Called round at yer lodgings t'other day and the skivvy swore you was out in Spain writin' a book or somethin'."

"That's right," I said. "Just got back, and damned glad to be home again."

"Not 'arf you ain't, I'll bet. Nice goin's on out there 'cording to wot they says in the papers." He gave my fingers

a final squeeze and then, stepping back, looked me up and down with a quick, searching glance. "'Ad a pretty tough time I reckon: see that by the weight you lost."

"Well, I did bump up against a spot of trouble," I admitted. "Nothing like as bad as it might have been, however." I offered him a cigarette. "Listen, Tubby," I continued, "what I really came down here for was to see whether I could dig you out. I don't want to interfere with business, but when you can spare a minute or two, there's a little matter I'd like to consult you about."

"Why, o' course! Can't manage it naow—too near the first race. 'Ow about after the four-thirty?"

"Where shall I meet you?"

"Better say outside the Tote Investor's Office." He looked round in the direction of his companion, who was still hovering furtively in the background. "Tell you wot—I got the old bus 'ere and the little boozer where I'm stayin's only a mile or two up the road. Wotyer say to comin' along there with me and givin' all this mob a chance to clear off? I'll drive you back to the station, and you can get up to Town nice and comf't'ble."

"That's a grand idea," I said. "Suit me down to the ground. In the meanwhile I'll just toddle along to the Enclosure and see if I can pick out a winner."

"I can give you one." He edged up closer and lowered his voice. "Gay Lady for the three-twenty—got it straight from a pal in the stable. Roll 'ome in a canter she will, you mark my words."

"Are you handing this out to your customers?" I inquired sceptically.

"Only to the 'alf-dollar ones." He winked.

"Well, she ought to be fast enough with a name like that. Let's hope she lives up to it." I paused. "See you outside the Tote office then about four-thirty, eh? Mustn't keep you any longer now or you'll be missing the cream of the market."

With a nod and a grin Tubby retreated rapidly to his former position. I saw him exchange a hurried word or two with his henchman, and then, suddenly tearing off his

panama and hurling it to the ground, he commenced striding round it like a man in a frenzy. About half a dozen startled passers-by pulled up and gaped at him curiously.

"Don't ask me where I gets my information from." He was spitting out the words in a kind of indignant snort. "If 'is Graice or 'is 'Ighness is good enough to slip me a word on the Q.T. you don't catch Tubby Green goin' round boastin' an' swankin'. Not bloomin' likely. 'Play the game'—that's my motter. I knows 'ow to keep my mouth shut, and when a nobleman or a gen'leman gives me the honour of 'is confidence you won't get 'is naime outer me, not with a blinkin' corkscrew." Pausing abruptly in his circular promenade he stood staring round at his rapidly increasing audience. "'Ow about last Thursday at Lingfield?" he demanded. "Wot did I do for yer then, eh? Five blinkin' winners in one afternoon. An' six to one the shortest price of the lot. Some of yer reads the paipers, I suppose. Some of yer must 'ave seen that piece about it Sunday mornin'. 'Tubby the Miracle Man,' that's wot they called me, and if any of yer doubts my word maybe there's someone 'ere as'll step forward and bear me out."

"That's right, that's true enough." The white-faced young man who had established himself at the back of the crowd pushed his way to the front. "Ad a photograph of 'im, too, they did, and damned flattering it were."

The interruption was greeted with a burst of laughter, and leaving the pair of them to get on with their business I turned quietly away and drifted towards the enclosure. Now that the main object of my journey had been successfully accomplished I felt I was fully entitled to a little comfortable relaxation.

Tattersall's ring was filling up rapidly with a smart and vivacious crowd of both sexes. Having scarcely set eyes on a pretty or well-dressed woman for the past eight months it would have given me considerable pleasure to stroll about and make up for this period of abstinence. The dread of being suddenly stopped by some inconvenient acquaintance, however, still haunted me, and feeling that 'Safety First' was the only sensible slogan, I headed for the stand and

climbed up discreetly into the back row. From the animated clamour going on down below it appeared that betting on the first event was already in active progress.

Thanks to Mr. Chetwynd I was now handsomely provided with funds, and deciding that I might as well have a flutter myself I sat down and began to study my card. The first race I looked at was the three-twenty. It proved to be a six furlong sprint for two-year-old fillies, and since there were no less than seventeen entries it seemed probable that the prices would be fairly generous. Tubby's selection figured third in the list. She was described as "*Col. Watson's b.f., Gay Lady, by Night Out—Belle of the Ball*, and she shared in the complimentary burden of 9 stone 7 allotted to the two leaders.

I was running my eye more or less carelessly over the remaining candidates when I suddenly caught sight of the name Suzanne. For one instant I thought I must be dreaming. There it was, however, plain as a pikestaff—*Sir George Glenny's ch.f., Suzanne, by Lucky Chance—My Partner*. In the opposite column were the owner's colours, "green and gold hoops, gold cap," and feeling as though I had received a direct message from Providence I sat there in a mood of half-hypnotized fascination staring down at the neatly printed words.

Superstition is not one of my besetting weaknesses, but faced by such an amazing coincidence there was obviously only one thing to be done. If anybody had ever been handed a tip on a plate that person was unquestionably myself. To waste time or money in trying to pick out another winner would be positively blasphemous: I had merely to reserve my energies until the three-twenty and then step down among the bookies and select my particular victim.

Having decided on this line of action, I allowed the first two races to go by without attempting to make a wager. In each case the favourite won easily. After the second, I sat for a few minutes watching a horde of successful backers swarm round the rails to collect their winnings, and then as they were gradually paid off and the excitement began to die down I turned my attention with an almost feverish

interest to the large square frame which announced the runners for the next event. Suzanne's number was 15, and when I saw it being hoisted into position I could hardly restrain myself from executing a little triumphant step dance.

Descending from my cyrie I sauntered across to the line of bookies, all of whom were now engaged in chalking up a fresh array of names and prices. As far as I could discover Suzanne was not even mentioned. An animal named Silver Star appeared to be the most fancied, and in the majority of cases Tubby's dead certainty, Gay Lady, was being offered to her admirers at the opening odds of 100 to 12.

After wandering along and inspecting the various lists, I pulled up in front of a massive, purple-faced gentleman who rejoiced in the slightly inappropriate name of Alf Lilly-white. With a grey bowler hat cocked rakishly to one side, and a long, unlighted cigar jutting out of the corner of his mouth, he looked exactly like a caricature by Tom Webster.

"What are you offering about Suzanne?" I inquired.

He looked down at me with a faintly pitying smile as though I were too good to be true.

"Twenty to one to you, sir. Want to back her both ways?" I shook my head.

"I'll just have three quid to win," I replied.

"Sixty pounds to three Suzanne. There you are, sir."

With an impressive flourish he handed me a card, and as he dropped the notes into his bag and his clerk scribbled down the bet I turned contentedly away and strolled back to the stand. I had done my bit, and now it was up to the gods.

After what seemed an interminable interval the warning sound of a bell rang out above the general uproar. The course began to clear rapidly, and looking out from my exalted perch I could see the twelve runners who were taking part in the race cantering up from the paddock in the direction of the starting gate. With the aid of a pair of old opera glasses, which I had borrowed from Mrs. Mudge, I was able to make out the green and gold hoops of Suzanne's jockey. He appeared to be having trouble with his mount, who was tossing her head fractiously, and making unavailing attempts to break into a gallop.



With a pleasant tingle in my heart I watched them form up into a straggling line. Suzanne, who had been drawn on the extreme outside, was still fidgeting about restlessly. On one occasion she even went so far as to whip right round in the opposite direction, and for a devastating instant I felt sure that she was going to be left at the post. Then, little by little, her rider coaxed her back into position, and at the very moment when he succeeded in getting her level with the others up went the tapes. There was a loud yell of "they're off," and surging forward like a many-coloured wave the whole party came galloping towards us.

Before they had covered three furlongs Silver Star was well out in front. She was a big, powerful grey, with a long raking stride, and from the manner in which she was being ridden it looked as though her jockey were confident that he had the race comfortably in his pocket. Gay Lady was lying second, while out on the far side, well away from the others, Suzanne's chestnut coat gleamed gallantly in the sunshine.

On they came in the same order, and already a number of hopeful supporters were beginning to bellow out the name of the favourite. For about three-quarters of the distance there seemed to be no change, and then, craning forward with my eyes glued to the glasses, I suddenly realised that the gap was beginning to narrow. Gay Lady and Suzanne were closing up rapidly. Another twenty yards and both of them were level with the leader. There was a rush of scurrying hooves, the wild roar of a deliriously excited multitude, and locked together in what appeared to be an inseparable dead heat all three of them came hurtling past the post. Only from the judge's box would it have been possible to name the winner.

Drawing in a deep breath I straightened up and stared across to where the numbers were being hoisted.

15

3

7

Suzanne. Gay Lady. Silver Star.

For a half-incredulous moment the announcement held me spell-bound, and then, as a long disappointed murmur floated up from the crowd, I hauled out my precious card and began to make my way down the side of the stand. I felt like grabbing hold of the nearest stranger and inviting him to have a drink at my expense.

In contrast with the previous race a mere trickle of people were heading for the rails. Mr. Alf Lillywhite and his clerk were standing at their post in almost complete isolation. Both appeared to be immersed in their book, and it was not until I pulled up in front of them and gave a tentative cough that the former raised his head.

"Ah!" he remarked sourly. "Thought we'd 'ave the pleasure of seein' you." He held out his hand for the ticket.

"Sixty-three pounds," I said cheerfully.

"That's O.K." The clerk gave a resentful nod.

"Thirty—forty—fifty——" Mr. Lillywhite paused in the middle of his counting. "Just as a matter of curiosity, Mister, wot made you fancy 'er?"

I shrugged. "Nothing in particular. I had a sudden inspiration. I get them at times."

"Oh, you do!" He stared at me with a sort of venomous distaste, and then, leaning forward, handed me the money. "Kind o' blinkin' fairy, ain't you!" he added bitterly.

Pocketing both the compliment and the cash, I relieved him of my presence, and having retreated to my former refuge, settled down to await my appointment. I was consumed by a mischievous amusement at the thought of Tubby's face when I casually informed him that I was sixty pounds to the good.

The following two races were in the nature of an anticlimax, and by the time it came to half-past four I was glad enough to escape from my lofty perch and turn my steps in the direction of the Tote. As I approached I saw Tubby standing beside the entrance looking round expectantly.

"Lousiest bit o' luck I ever run up against," was his opening remark. "If it 'adn't been for that stinkin' outsider she'd 'ave cantered 'ome easy as kiss me foot."

"Never mind," I said consolingly. "She put up a damned good show."

"You backed her both ways, o' course?"

I shook my head. "As a matter of fact I didn't back her at all. I changed my mind at the last minute and had three quid on the winner."

"Crikey!" His jaw dropped. "Who the blazes put yer on to 'er?"

"No one," I replied. "Suzanne happens to be the name of my best girl. I had to support her, naturally."

"Well, strike me dead!" He relieved his feelings by spitting on the grass. "You pick up a few more like that an' you'll be chasin' around in a Rolls Royce."

"It will pay for the drinks, anyhow," I replied. "Do you think your landlord can dig us out a bottle of fizz?"

"Not 'arf. Let's shift orf outer 'ere and git a move on. Twenty to one, eh? Gor lumme, wot a ruddy miracle!"

Still murmuring to himself, he led the way outside, and a few minutes later, wedged tightly in an ancient Baby Austin, we were careering recklessly along the narrow and winding road which led westward in the direction of Shepperton. Discovering that Tubby's ideas of handling a car differed widely from my own, I was careful not to distract his attention by entering into conversation. To the occasional remarks that he let drop I returned only the briefest of answers, and when at last he pulled up safely in front of a small wayside inn I felt more convinced than ever that Providence, for the time being, had seen fit to take me under its special protection.

"Always stay 'ere when I'm around these parts," remarked my companion. "Fox and Gripes they calls it, and Bill Cherry the landlord's one of me oldest pals."

He wriggled his way out, and, copying his example, I followed him along a stone-paved passage, which brought us to a side door. In reply to his knock there was a clump of heavy footsteps, and the next moment we were confronted by a vast, perspiring man, in shirt sleeves, who bore a striking resemblance to some of the less flattering portraits of Henry

the Eighth. The most noticeable difference lay in the fact that its owner was clean-shaven.

"'Ullo!" he rumbled genially. "Back a bit early, ain't yer? Been givin' 'em too many losers an' 'ad to do a bunk?"

"Don't you try to be funny, Bill: 'tain't your line." With a good-natured grin Tubby pulled me forward. "Want to introjooce yer to a friend o' mine—name o' Mister Reid. Him an' me's goin' to have a little talk, see? Thought as 'ow yer wouldn't mind my takin' 'im upstairs."

"Pleased to meet yer." Mr. Cherry extended an enormous hand and enfolded mine in a crushing grip. "That's all right," he added, turning to Tubby. "But why not step into the office and make yourselves comf't'ble? Shan't be openin' not for another twenty minutes."

"Suit us a treat, that would." Tubby chuckled. "My friend's bin askin' me whether you got such a thing as a bottle o' champagne. Backed a bloomin' outsider and wants to do the job 'andsome."

"Leave it to me." Mr. Cherry brightened visibly. "I'll give yer something as the King of England wouldn't turn up 'is nose at."

Leading the way through another door, he conducted us into the bar, a low-ceilinged, rather frowsty-smelling place, divided into two compartments. By means of a hinged flap we passed in behind the counter, and, following our host, found ourselves in what was evidently his private cubby hole. It was just large enough to contain a roll-top desk, a small safe and a couple of very ancient chairs. The air reeked richly of stale tobacco smoke.

"You'll be nice an' snug 'ere," observed Mr. Cherry optimistically. "'Elp yourselves to a cigar if you fancy one." He nodded towards the top of the desk. "I'll just pop down to the cellar an' fetch the bubbly. Shan't be more'n a couple o' seconds."

Lumbering out again, he departed on his mission, and having accepted one of the large cheroots which Tubby extracted from their box, I took what appeared to be the sounder of the two chairs. We had barely had time to light up before Mr. Cherry rejoined us.

"'Ere you are," he announced, proudly displaying a bottle. "Piper 'Idesick, nineteen thirty! Wotjer say to that, boys?"

"Sounds hopeful," I remarked.

"Where did you pinch it from?" inquired Tubby.

"Odd 'alf dozen I got 'old of when they sold up that music-'all tart at the bungalow." With practised skill the speaker yanked out the cork, and filling up the glasses which he had brought with him turned to me and bowed ceremoniously. "Your very good 'ealth, mister, and I 'opes we shall 'ave the pleasure of seein' you again. Any friend o' Tubby's is always welcome at the Fox."

We all three took a long sip, and then, smacking his lips appreciatively, Mr. Cherry helped himself to a cheroot. "Well, I'll be orf now," he added, "and get on with a bit o' cleanin' up. Make yourselves at 'ome, and stay 'ere as long as you like. No one won't interrupt you, not unless it's me or the missus."

Carrying his half-finished glass, he took himself off, and as the door closed behind him Tubby lay back and cocked up his feet on the desk.

"Naow, Professor," he observed cheerfully, "taike it easy and let's 'ear wot's bitin' yer."

"Ever come across a fellow called Vincent Grantley?"

"Vince Grantley!" He sat up with a jerk. "You ain't meanin' the bloke who runs the S.P. joint in the Strand?"

"Might be. He's a bookie, anyway."

"Come across 'im! I should ruddy well say I 'ave."

"Well, if you've any dope you can give me I shall be much obliged."

"I can tell you one thing straight away. If yer lookin' round for the dirtiest tyke in London you've just about picked a winner."

"That's more or less what I imagine." I paused. "How long have you known him, and where did he blow in from?"

"Let's see . . . must be the best part o' three years. Yus, that'd be right. Got 'is licence in thirty-four, saime month old Tich Foster died. Can't say where 'e come from, or wot 'e was doin' previous. Something rotten, you bet yer life."

"Sounds as though you didn't like him."

"You said it." Tubby removed his cigar and expectorated into an adjacent spittoon. "Mark you, I ain't one to bear malice to nobody. Live an' let live, that's my motter. All the saime, if someone was to tip that barstard out of a third-floor winder, I'd feel like walkin' up and bleedin' well kissin' 'im."

"What's the trouble?" I inquired. "Has he been pulling some funny stuff on you?"

"Not likely. I can take care of meself. There's others that can't, though—get my meanin'?"

"Not exactly," I confessed.

"See that chap I was talkin' with when you come along? Weedy-lookin' cove with a white faice."

I nodded. "Your assistant, I gather."

"That's right. Lad called Davy—used to be clerk in the Tote orfice once. Took 'im on when 'e come outer quod, I did. Done six months for trying to shove a knife into the gent we're talking about."

"What, Grantley?" I raised my eyebrows. "I suppose he had some fairly sound reason."

"I'd say so. Walkin' out with a girl 'e was . . . pretty a little piece as you'd find anywhere. Worked as a typist at that stinker's orfice, and wot does she do one day but slip orf quietly an' drown 'erself. Goin' to 'ave a kid, see, and wouldn't faice up to it. Left a note for Davy tellin' 'im the blighter 'ad bunged 'er up with drink, and that she hadn't rightly known wot she was doin' of."

"Did that come out at the inquest?" I demanded.

Tubby shook his head. "The young fool wouldn't so much as open 'is mouth. Knocked clean orf 'is rocker, if you ask me, and didn't care a cuss wot they done to 'im. If the doctor 'adn't seen 'e was sick as like as not 'e'd 'ave got two years."

"What made you take him on?" I inquired. "Was it just out of kindness?"

"Well, I'd known 'im before all this 'appened. Decent enough kid 'e was too. Come to me when they let 'im out an' spilt the 'ole business. Couldn't find no work nachurly,

and seein' as the bloke I 'ad then was always 'alf boozed, struck me I might do worse than give 'im a trial. Not sorry I did, neither—turned out real smart 'e 'as. All I'm worryin' about is that 'e'll 'ave another go at that swine, saime as 'e's always threatenin'. Do 'im in nex' time, maybe, and get 'isself strung up."

"The Law's all wrong in cases of this sort," I remarked. "Killing people like Grantley oughtn't to be regarded as a crime: it should come into the same category as pig-sticking."

"That's a good un." Tubby grinned appreciatively. "If it ain't askin' too much, 'ow did you come to run up against 'im?"

I hesitated for a moment, wondering whether to take 'im into my confidence. If I did, and if we could rope him in on our side, he would certainly be a most useful recruit. His natural cunning and his wide acquaintance with the seamy side of life were just the very qualities needed for the job on hand, while in view of the obligation under which he still considered himself to be, I felt thoroughly satisfied that I could rely upon his loyalty. Yes, risky as it was, the experiment seemed to be worth trying.

"Look here, Tubby," I said slowly, "if I answer your question will you swear that you'll keep what I tell you absolutely under your hat? You see, I haven't only got myself to think about: there's a girl in it as well."

"You've no call to ask that, Professor." He looked at me reproachfully. "Think I'd let you down after wot you done for me? Cut me throat fust, strike me dead I would."

"I trust you, of course," I assured him. "All I meant was that it's a rather sticky business, and if you don't want to be mixed up with it I'd just like you to forget it. Wash it right out and pretend that we haven't discussed the matter."

"Won't need no washing." Tubby shook his head grimly. "If I can 'elp yer shove one across Mr. Vincent Grantley that'd suit me fine!" He licked his lips. "Know wot I'd do if I 'ad me way? Stamp on 'is faice I would, and then make 'im clean me boots."

"Not a bad idea: we'll keep it in mind." I edged my chair a shade closer. "The girl I'm talking about is half

French," I continued. "I met her at Bordeaux on my way home. She told me an extraordinary story, so extraordinary that at first I didn't know whether to believe it or not. Now I've been into things a bit farther I'm practically certain it's true."

"Tain't often the caise," observed Tubby. "Still, it do 'appen at times."

"About four years ago," I went on, "her old grandfather, who lived at Bordeaux, was brutally murdered. Somebody broke into the house, cut his throat and cleared off with a packet of valuable precious stones which he kept in his bedroom. The only other person in the house was the woman who looked after him. She was questioned by the police, but they couldn't get a damn thing out of her, and after a while they let the whole case drop. Nothing more was heard of it until last week, and then, quite unexpectedly, the girl got a letter from France asking her to go over and see a woman who was dying in hospital. This woman turned out to be her grandfather's housekeeper. She told the girl that the chap who had committed the murder was an Englishman named Robert Norton, who had been her lover. That was why she had kept her mouth shut. He'd worked at a racing stable, and when she described his appearance the girl, who lives in London, recognised him immediately. It was a man she had met at a night-club, a bookmaker who called himself Vincent Grantley."

For at least three seconds Tubby sat gaping at me in silence.

"Well, kick me in the pants," he muttered. "Wot's she goin' to do—bung him over to the cops?"

"That's just where the snag comes in. At present she has only got this woman's word for it. Unless she can dig out some more evidence the French police will probably refuse to take her seriously. As I told you, they shut down on the case over three years ago, and it's not going to be an easy job to persuade them to reopen it. Means asking for an extradition order and Heaven knows what. You can take it from me they'll want some pretty definite proof before they put themselves to all that trouble."



"I believe you. Cops is the saime everywhere." Tubby scowled. "Maikes yer a bit wild, though," he added viciously. "Eat my bloomin' 'at, I could, when I thinks of that perisher gettin' away with it."

"Exactly how I feel. In fact I dislike the idea so much that, between ourselves, I've made up my mind to barge in." I paused. "Wouldn't like to join the party and lend us a hand, I suppose?"

"Wot me!"

"It isn't really fair to ask you. After all, it's none of your business and——"

"None o' my business?" repeated Tubby indignantly. "Why, if it weren't for you wot would I be doin' of neow? Shovin' up the ruddy daisies as like as not." He shook off the ash of his cigar and glanced round furtively in the direction of the door. "Come on, Professor," he continued, lowering his voice. "You tell us wot yer gettin' at, an' leave the rest to me. I'm in on this, that's a cert."

"Well, it's going to be a bit tricky. I've talked it all over with the girl, and we've decided that the only chance is to get into Grantley's house and have a squint through his private papers. Just possible there may be something amongst them which will prove that he's Robert Norton. He keeps them in a safe in his study, and if we can fix things up we hope to arrange it so that we can catch him alone when his servant is having an evening out. My job will be to give him a punch in the jaw and put him to sleep. Then we can open the safe and if we happen to find anything useful in the way of evidence we shall slip across to France and hand it over to the authorities there. We haven't had time to work out all the details yet, but that's what you might call the rough idea."

"Strewth!" Tubby stared at me with a sort of respectful admiration. "Punch 'im in the jaw an' lay 'im out, eh? Wouldn't miss seeing it, not if yer was to order me the Bank of England."

"If that's how you feel," I observed, "I'd be damned glad of your company. I shall probably have to do a spot of house-breaking in order to get in, and as I've never tried anything of the sort before I may need a little assistance. Of course

I'm not suggesting that you know anything more about it than I do."

"Too perlite, ain't yer," Tubby grinned. "Ow soon d'you reckon to pull it orf? Some day this week?"

"Can't tell you at the moment: all depends on the girl. I shall be seeing her to-morrow, and if she's managed to fix up a definite time I'll let you know at once. Talking of that, where can I get hold of you?"

"Know a little Eytalian restaurant called Parelli's in Owen's Court? 'Taint far from the Palace Theatre."

"I can find it."

"Well, that's where I 'ang out. All yer gotter do is to ring the bottom bell in the side door, see? If I ain't in you can leave a note with the Boss: I'll get it right enough."

"Good." I wrote down the name and address on the top of my racing card. "By the way, there's a couple of points I ought to mention just in case of accidents: until this business is cleared up I'm not using my own name. I'm calling myself Russell."

"I get yer."

"And of course," I continued, "that being so, I don't want anyone to know that I'm back in England. You'll be careful not to let it out, won't you? Might get me into a hell of a mess."

Very deliberately Tubby wetted his forefinger and with a reassuring wink drew it across his throat.

"Mum as a bleedin' oyster," he replied solemnly.

## CHAPTER VI

"COME in," I muttered.

The door handle turned, and opening my eyes reluctantly I caught sight of Gertie. Advancing to my bedside she plumped down a tray containing a cup of tea and some discuts, and then, turning away, proceeded to draw up the blind. A flood of sunshine streaming in through the window

roused me effectively out of my pleasant, half-conscious torpor.

"Hullo!" I remarked, rubbing my eyes. "What's the time?"

"Just gone 'alf past eight. There was a letter come for you by the post, so I brought it up."

"Thanks." I glanced at the business-like looking envelope lying beside my plate, and saw that it was stamped on the back with the name and address of Messrs. Headford and Chetwynd. "You might do something for me," I added. "Tell Mrs. Mudge that I've promised to ring up a friend at nine o'clock, so if I shan't be in the way I'll come down and use her 'phone."

"I'll let 'er know."

Picking up my shoes, Gertie took herself off with a friendly grin, and having swallowed a mouthful of tea, I turned my attention to Mr. Chetwynd's communication. It was in his own handwriting, and bore the previous day's date.

"MY DEAR ALAN,

"I am sorry I had to run away this morning as there are still several matters on which I think it would be advisable to have a little further discussion. I shall be glad, therefore, if during the course of the next two or three days you can snatch sufficient time from your own private affairs to look me up at the office. Make it about twelve o'clock, and then we can have some lunch afterwards. In the meanwhile I must repeat that no matter how intriguing these private affairs may be, any step on your part which might involve you in fresh difficulties would at the present juncture be nothing short of criminal lunacy.

"Well, having relieved myself of this sage counsel I will only add that the inquiries which I proposed to inaugurate have been duly set in motion, and that according to the party responsible for conducting them there is a very favourable chance of their turning out successfully. If that should prove to be the case we can look forward to future developments with a certain degree of pleasurable anticipation.

"By the way, I forgot to inform you that I have retained the admirable Bates as caretaker at Bracken Hall, and that I am at present paying him the same wages. I take it that this arrangement will meet with your approval? The news that the property had been left to you appeared to afford him an almost malicious satisfaction. I gather that his opinion of our friend Maurice Trevor more or less coincides with our own.

Yours sincerely,  
ROBERT CHETWYND."

The letter was characteristic of its writer, and lying there smoking a cigarette I once more thanked my lucky stars that the execution of Cousin Melville's will should have been entrusted to such friendly hands. His reference to my old acquaintance Bates pleased me particularly. I had intended to ask about him while I was in the office, and the news that he was still carrying on with his duties was as welcome a piece of information as I could possibly have received. Bracken Hall without Bates would have seemed painfully empty. I could picture his fatherly smile when he opened the front door to me, and I was suddenly seized by a mischievous impulse to take Suzanne up to Hampstead and introduce her to my new inheritance. The interesting fact that I was its owner, would, of course, have to remain a secret. The proper time for putting her wise to the true state of affairs had not yet arrived. It would be best, I felt, to postpone my confession until the Grantley business had been successfully disposed of, when, in gratitude for my services, the deception which I had found it necessary to practise might, I hoped, be magnanimously overlooked. It was evident that as things stood Suzanne trusted me implicitly. To shatter her confidence at this critical stage might produce a sudden revulsion of feeling, and by now I had become much too fond of her to risk anything so deplorable. For the present I must remain the impecunious adventurer in whom, for some unaccountable reason, she had come to place her faith.

On the whole, in spite of Mr. Chetwynd's request, I decided that for the time being the wisest course to adopt would be

to keep away from Bedford Row. He was obviously convinced that I was mixed up in some undesirable entanglement, from which it was important that I should be extricated as soon as possible, and knowing how clever and persuasive he could be when he chose to exercise his powers, I had an uneasy feeling that if I saw too much of him he would probably succeed in worming out the actual state of affairs. That, to use a vulgar but expressive phrase, would "put the lid" on everything. The whole business would be promptly taken out of my hands, and instead of enjoying the gratifying honour of being Suzanne's private knight errant, I should merely figure as a contemptible humbug who had wriggled out of a job which he was too cowardly to tackle. Besides, there was another point—the little matter of Tubby's story. No real concern of mine, of course, but somehow or other the vision of that dead girl's white face staring up out of some weedy pond was etched upon my mind with a vivid and unpleasant realism. When I thought of Mr. Vincent Grantley's jaw my knuckles positively tingled.

Getting out of bed and pulling on a dressing-gown I made my way downstairs. Mrs. Mudge's room proved to be empty, and assuming that Gertie had delivered my message I sat down at the 'phone and dialled Suzanne's number. Almost immediately I heard the welcome sound of her voice, with its faint attractive hint of a French accent.

"Is that you, Alan?"

"It is," I replied. "How are you, Partner, and what's the news?"

"There is quite a lot, but I will not tell you now. We shall be seeing each other this morning; that is arranged."

"Why, yes, we're lunching together; don't you remember?"

"Of course I do. I am sorry I shall not have time to go into the country though. I have an engagement at three o'clock that I forgot all about."

"Never mind, we'll make it nearer home. What do you say to going to Hampstead and feeding at the Spaniards? They do one very well up there."

"I should love to. I have never seen the Heath. Isn't it where Dick Turpin used to ride about, shooting people?"

"So I'm told, but you needn't be afraid of tripping over any corpses. They've all been cleared away long ago." I paused. "Well, what about it? When will you be ready, and where shall we meet? Like me to call for you in a taxi?"

"No, I do not think you had better come here. I will be outside Notting Hill Gate Station at twelve o'clock. Will that do?"

"You couldn't make it a shade earlier," I suggested. "There's something I want to show you before lunch."

"Shall we say a quarter to then?" She appeared to hesitate for a moment. "How—how did you get on at Hurst Park? Did you find that friend of yours and have a talk to him?"

"I did, and everything went off swimmingly. Amongst other trifles I had three pounds on a twenty to one winner."

"Oh, but how splendid! What was its name?"

"The most beautiful name in the world; that's why I backed it. It was called Suzanne."

"Is that true, or are you just making fun of me?"

"I never joke about money," I replied. "It's too sacred a subject."

"Well, I am glad I brought you luck. I feel as though it were a good omen."

"Same here. By the way, have you had your breakfast?"

"Not yet. I have just put the kettle on."

"I mustn't keep you talking then, in case it boils over. Don't eat too much or you may spoil your lunch."

She laughed softly. "You need not worry. It is only coffee and a biscuit."

The telephone clicked, and reluctantly laying down the receiver I consoled myself with the reflection that in less than three hours I should be actually in her company. Even so, it seemed a long time to wait, and as I mounted the staircase it occurred to me that the best way of getting through the interval would be to put in a little belated work on the packet of notes and memoranda which was reposing unopened in the drawer of my writing table. Up till now I had been too busy even to attempt it.

Accordingly, as soon as I had had a bath and disposed of a couple of poached eggs, I settled down to my task. Before long

I had become so absorbed in sorting and classifying that the time slipped away unnoticed, and it was with something of a shock that on glancing at my watch after what seemed to me a comparatively short session, I made the unexpected discovery that it was already half-past eleven.

Hastily tidying up my papers I grabbed my hat and sallied out into the sunshine. A more delightful morning it would have been impossible to imagine. So far as my assignations with Suzanne were concerned Nature had evidently made up her mind to treat me in a really handsome spirit, and feeling properly gratified at such a special mark of favour I made my way down to the main road and crossed over towards the Tube station.

Just as I was approaching it Suzanne appeared from the opposite direction. On catching sight of me her face lit up in a welcoming smile, and the next moment, regardless of the fact that we were blocking up the entrance, I was standing there holding her hand and gazing down blissfully into her clear, hazel-brown eyes.

"I don't know what you've been doing to yourself, Partner," I said, "but you look ravishingly beautiful this morning."

"I put on a little make-up. I'm glad it is such a success." She stepped back, as a large scowling-faced woman pushed aggressively past. "Had we not better move along? We seem to be getting unpopular."

"Perhaps you're right." I slipped my arm through hers and drew her towards the edge of the pavement. "One can't expect people to appreciate works of art at this hour; it's too soon after breakfast." As I spoke I caught the eye of a passing taxi-driver, and swerving abruptly in response to my signal, he pulled up in front of us. He was a stoutish, elderly man, not unlike the pictures of that immortal warrior "Old Bill."

"I want to go to Hampstead," I informed him.

"Don't blame yer, Guv'nor. Just 'ow I'd feel if I 'ad a day off and a young lady to keep me comp'ny." With an approving glance at Suzanne he leaned sideways and jerked open the door. "Any partic'lar part you 'appen to 'ave a fancy for?"

"If you put us down half-way up Heath Street," I said, "that will do nicely."

There was a brief silence as we clambered in, and then, settling herself in the well-padded seat, Suzanne leaned back and gave a little sigh of contentment.

"I am so looking forward to my lunch," she announced. "I hope it will be a good one."

"Don't tell me that you're really interested in food!" I exclaimed hopefully. "I always knew we had a lot in common but——"

"Of course I am. What do you imagine when I am half French?" She laughed. "Wait till we have finished what we have to do, and then I will invite you to my flat and I will prepare the dinner myself. I am a very good cook, though you may not believe me."

"I shall just live for the moment," I declared. "Let's hope it will arrive quickly."

"That is very possible." She paused and her face suddenly became hard and tense. "I saw those people who took me to Grantley's house, and I am almost certain that what I suspected is really true. Everything they told me makes me believe more and more that he is Robert Norton."

"Did you get hold of any definite facts?"

"He can speak French for one thing. They have heard him talking to Emile, who is head waiter at The Merry Andrew. It struck them as being strange, because although he has plenty of money he is what you call common and uneducated."

"Very interesting bit of news." I nodded. "Manage to pick up anything with regard to his private affairs?"

"Only that he arrived in London three or four years ago. Where he came from no one seems to have the slightest idea. He took that house in St. John's Wood, started going to race meetings and night clubs and all those sort of places, and then when he had got to know a good number of people, he set up as a bookmaker. They say he is doing very well."

"More or less what I've gathered."

"But listen, I have not told you the most important part yet." She laid her hand on my sleeve. "In the evening I went to the Club and almost the first person I ran into was



Grantley himself. As usual he was a little drunk. It must be two months since our last meeting, and he seems to have forgotten what I said to him. Or perhaps he does not care. Anyhow, he started to make love to me, or what he would call to make love, and this time I did not get angry. I allowed him to go on. He asked me again if I would come to his house. He said that he would show me some diamonds he had bought, and that if I was nice to him I could choose one of them as a present." Her fingers tightened. "Diamonds—you understand? They are perhaps some of the very stones that he stole when he killed my grandfather."

"What did you say?"

"I let him think that I was tempted, but that I could not quite make up my mind. I promised to meet him at the Club to-morrow night and give him my answer then."

"Why didn't you fix it up straight away?"

"I want you to see him first. I want to know whether you are quite sure that you can knock him down. He is a big, strong man, and you will have to hit him very hard indeed."

"Don't worry; I can pull out a fairly useful punch when it's really needed." I patted her hand encouragingly. "All the same," I added, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to run an eye over the brute. How do I get into the place, that's the point? Doesn't one want an introduction or something of the sort?"

"This will be enough. All you have to do is to give it to the man at the door." Opening her bag she produced a visiting card with a few words scribbled on the back. "You know the address—24, Burton Street. It will be best if you get there at about eleven o'clock. You have such a thing as a dinner jacket?"

"Yes, we can run to that," I admitted modestly.

"You will see me, of course, but you must not recognise me, or try to speak to me. Perhaps, after I have talked with Grantley, I may be able to send you a note and arrange to meet you somewhere. If not, I will ring you up in the morning."

"Good." I tucked the card away in my pocket. "Between us," I continued, "we seem to be progressing rather favour-

ably. I've had a bit of a brain wave about our friend Tubby. The question is whether you'll approve of it."

"Tell me, please. I am so anxious to know what has happened."

"Suppose we wait till we're having lunch?" I suggested. "We shall be getting up to Hampstead in a minute, and I want you to keep your eyes open and tell me how you like it."

"What is it you particularly wish to show me?" she inquired.

"Just a house—a Queen Anne house that used to belong to my cousin. I mean the old boy who left me the legacy. By the way, I got fifty pounds of it out of his lawyer, so with that and what I won at Hurst Park I'm positively basking in wealth."

She shook her head gravely. "I do not think you can be trusted with money. I feel that I ought to take it away and look after it for you. I am sure it would last you much longer."

"You're probably right," I admitted. "In fact I'm half inclined to offer you the job. If things go on as they're doing now I shall need a financial secretary."

As I spoke we breasted the summit of Fitzjohn's Avenue, and a minute later we had whisked past the restful vista of Church Row and pulled up with a jerk on the left-hand side of Heath Street. The narrow road that led through to Bracken Hall was almost exactly opposite.

"It's a kind of psychological experiment," I explained as we crossed over. "I am going to introduce you to what I consider the most attractive house in London, and I want to see whether you agree with me. If you do I shall feel that I'm beginning to understand you."

"But I am not certain I approve of that," she smiled. "In France they say it is the first step towards disillusion."

"People must be disillusioned before they can become real friends," I pointed out. "It's a painful but necessary process, and the best way is to get it over as quickly as possible."

"Then I think you should tell me something more about yourself?"

"Of course I should," I agreed. "I am only putting you first because you are the most interesting and important of the two. When it comes to my turn I shall have quite a lot to confess."

"Well, it will make no difference." She gave a little shrug. "I either like people straight away or else not at all. I just know at once."

By now the high, ivy-covered wall which enclosed three sides of the Hall grounds was only a few yards ahead of us. The feeling that everything inside it was legally my property filled me with a sudden queer sense of elation, and taking Suzanne firmly by the arm I advanced triumphantly towards the two tall iron gates. The only thing that worried me was the possibility of blundering across Bates. At the present stage of our relationship that would be distinctly awkward.

"Here we are," I observed, coming to a halt. "This is my dream palace, Partner. Have a good look and tell me what you think about it."

For a moment or two we both stood there silently, peering in through the delicately wrought ironwork. With its gay border of flowers and its pool and fountain in the centre the old paved courtyard was looking as friendly and attractive as ever. It provided a perfect foreground for the warm, time-mellowed brick of which the house itself was constructed, and glancing surreptitiously at my companion's face I saw, to my delight, that she had immediately and instinctively fallen under its spell.

"But it is charming," she exclaimed, "perfectly charming! Is it as nice inside as it looks from out here?"

"Every bit," I assured her. "The rooms are all panelled in oak, and there's a stone terrace at the back with a beautiful garden and any amount of roses. The old boy was tremendously proud of it, and spent a pile of money in keeping it up."

"I can understand that." She nodded. "If I were rich it is exactly the sort of place I should like to live in."

My heart gave a gratified jump. "Perhaps you will some day," I remarked. "After all, stranger things have happened."

"What do you mean?"

"I was thinking about that emerald cross," I explained. "If Grantley has been afraid to get rid of it we shall probably find it in his safe. I suppose you can prove that it's your property?"

"Oh yes, I have all the papers, of course."

"Well, there you are! After he has been arrested the police will have to hand it over, and there will be nothing to stop you walking out and selling it. Then you can call on the present owner and make him an offer."

She laughed. "It sounds beautifully simple, but perhaps he may not wish to part with it. Who is he, do you happen to know?"

"Some distant relation or other. I can't tell you his name."

"Well, he is a very fortunate man, and I hope he appreciates it." She turned away reluctantly and glanced at her watch.

"Now I think we ought to have our lunch. You have got to tell me about that friend of yours, and if I am to be back by three there will not be too much time."

"Come along then," I said. "It's only a short walk, and the fresh air will give us an appetite."

Ten minutes later we were taking our places at a corner table in the pleasant upstairs dining-room at The Spaniards, with the faint caressing perfume of honeysuckle drifting in through the open windows. We were the first arrivals, and the waiter, a plump, fatherly individual, who bore a remarkable resemblance to Bates, was beaming benevolently on Suzanne and handing us the menu.

"If you take my advice, sir," he murmured confidentially "you'll have the roast duck. Couple o' lovely young birds just come in this morning."

"Very obliging of them." I looked across at Suzanne, who gave an approving nod. "Duck undoubtedly," I continued, "duck, peas, stuffing, apple sauce and a large helping of new potatoes. If you could find us a bottle of really good Burgundy that would be perfect. You see it's this young lady's first visit to Hampstead, and I want her to carry away a favourable impression."

"I'll speak to the gov'nor, sir. You leave it to me."

With another indulgent smile he took himself off, and putting back the tiny mirror in which she had been contemplating her reflection, my companion re-closed her bag and glanced appreciatively round the room.

"I like this place," she announced. "It reminds me of some of the old inns one comes across in France. I expect it would have appealed to my father."

"We'll drop in here often," I said encouragingly, "that's to say as long as we're not making a mistake about Grantley. If we are we shall probably have to spend a year or two in gaol for assault and burglary."

"That is what I keep on thinking of and worrying about." She frowned. "For you, I mean, not for myself. You have been so kind in offering to help me, and I should feel horrible if——"

"Cheer up," I interrupted. "I was only being morbidly facetious. After the talk I had with Tubby I'm prepared to bet a hundred to one that there's no such person as Mr. Vincent Grantley. You're absolutely right about him; he's nothing but a rebound edition of Robert Norton."

Her face lit up hopefully. "What did you find out?" she demanded.

"You shall have the whole story in a minute," I assured her. "Just sit tight till the duck arrives, and then we shan't be interrupted."

In a commendably short time a couple of lavishly heaped plates, accompanied by a bottle of genuine "Nuits St. Georges" were set down in front of us, and as soon as the waiter had departed to attend to some fresh customers I filled up the glasses and proceeded to carry out my promise. I did it very thoroughly, and without any attempt at hurrying. As accurately as I could remember I repeated everything that Tubby had told me, including the ugly incident about the drowned girl, and as my tale progressed and the picture of Grantley became more definite and repellent, I could see, by the smouldering hatred in Suzanne's eyes, that if there seemed to be the smallest chance of bringing him to justice she would allow no considerations of personal danger to stand

in her way. Despite Mr. Chetwynd's good advice I was feeling very much like that myself.

"There's not a scrap of real evidence in all this, of course," I finished regretfully. "Still, it does help to prove that the fellow's an unmitigated skunk. I'd love to ram his teeth down his throat, even if he didn't murder your grandfather."

"But he did, and it is quite possible that he killed that girl too." She pushed away her plate and sat silent for a moment, her fingers clenched and her eyes fixed on mine. "What is this idea that you were not sure I should approve of?"

"I thought of taking Tubby into our confidence and bringing him along with me when we tackle Grantley. He might be uncommonly useful." I watched her with some anxiety.

"You feel you could trust him?"

"Oddly enough I do. He may have done one or two shady things in his time, but as far as his relations with me are concerned he has always been as straight as a die. Perhaps I'm flattering myself, but I believe he would go to the stake rather than get me into trouble."

"Yes, there are people like that—people who do not forget when someone has been kind to them." She paused. "Very well then, since you think it would be a good plan I have no objection to your telling him. All that matters is that we should get into the house and open the safe. If we . . ."

"What will you have to follow, sir?"

The voice of the waiter brought her to an abrupt stop, and straightening herself in her chair she glanced at the menu which I handed across the table.

"How about you, Alan?" she asked. "I do not feel as if I could eat anything more myself; not after that huge helping. Do you think we could go down and have our coffee in the garden?"

"That will be quite all right, Miss." The waiter beamed at her encouragingly. "I will give them the order, and the boy will bring it out to you."

I paid the bill, and having finished off the remainder of my burgundy, which it would have been a sin to leave behind, accompanied Suzanne down the narrow twisting

staircase and through the long, low-ceilinged bar that opened on to the lawn. As we came out a flock of sparrows who were engaged in lunching off bread crumbs rose up and fluttered away with indignant protests. On every side there was a riot of rambler roses, and except for a magnificent old gardener, who looked like one of the Hebrew patriarchs, we seemed to have the whole place entirely to ourselves.

We had just taken possession of a couple of chairs in a shady corner when the boy arrived with the coffee. It was good coffee, and as I sat there sipping it luxuriously and enjoying a cigarette, such a feeling of lazy contentment crept over me that I had no desire to talk. Our surroundings appeared to affect Suzanne in the same fashion, and it was only after a lengthy interval that with a little characteristic shrug she suddenly broke the silence.

"It all seems so queer when one comes to think it over. A week ago I had never even heard of you, and yet here we are now planning to do something which, as you say, may send us both to prison. I feel, sometimes, as if I was dreaming, and that I should wake up and find myself in bed."

"I hope you won't," I remarked. "I should hate to be nothing but a detached fragment of nightmare. It would be a thin, chilly sort of existence even in this weather."

"There is not much fear of it." She smiled. "You look solid enough at the moment, anyhow."

"I ought to, after all that duck!" I leaned back and contemplated her happily. "What I should like to do," I continued, "is to sit here the whole afternoon and look at the tip of your nose. It's the most adorable thing I have ever seen."

"But you must be teasing me. Why, it turns up at the end. That is all wrong."

"Only from the classical standard," I objected. "Since then our ideas on beauty have become more subtle."

"Well, I am glad you find it attractive. I am afraid I shall have to take it away quite soon though." Once again she glanced at her watch. "Do you think there is any chance of our being able to find a taxi?"

"Let's ask the gardener," I suggested. "He looks as if he

knew the answer to everything." I rose to my feet and strolled across to where the old man was tying up some roses. "Can you tell me whether there is a 'phone here?" I inquired. "I should like to ring up for a taxi if it's possible."

"You'd best speak to Mr. Spencer, the gov'nor. That's him coming along now."

He nodded towards the further end of the garden, and turning my head I caught sight of an alert-looking, trimly-built man of about fifty whose carriage and bearing suggested that he had seen service in the army. He was advancing directly towards us, accompanied by a small, curly-haired boy who toddled solemnly beside him clutching at his hand.

"Good morning," I said, as he came up. "I wonder if you would be so kind as to let me use your 'phone. We want a taxi to take us back to Town."

"I can do better for you than that," he replied. "There's a pal of mine inside called Jack Taylor, who's got a car which he uses for hire. It's over there in the yard. He'll run you in, if I ask him, and I don't expect it will cost you any more."

"That would be splendid," I said gratefully.

"But what a darling little boy! He has a face like a cherub—one of Michael Angelo's cherubs." Suzanne had moved forward to where we were standing. "He is your son, yes?"

"Grandson," replied the landlord proudly. "Three years old to-morrow. Come on, Ronnie, be polite and say how-d'ye-do."

A pair of large blue eyes looked up gravely.

"Howyedo, plitty lady?" lisped their owner.

"Thank you, Ronnie. That was too sweet of you." Laughing softly, Suzanne stooped down and kissed him on the cheek.

"Observant for his age, isn't he?" I remarked.

"Not too bad." Our host shot a sideways glance at Suzanne, and his eyes twinkled. "You must blame his mother," he added drily. "She's always impressing on him that he's got to speak the truth."



## CHAPTER VII

DESPITE the undeniable change in its character, Burton Street still retained many traces of an earlier and more dignified era. The houses, which in Victorian days had had all been private residences, were now chiefly occupied by art dealers and dressmakers, but externally, except for an occasional plate-glass window displaying a solitary frock or a few specimens of deftly-arranged china, there was nothing to indicate that progressive decline in the social scale which had gradually but inevitably overtaken them.

Number twenty-four, which had been recently repainted, looked a trifle smarter than its neighbours. A neat brass plate, announcing that it was "The Merry Andrew Club", was affixed to the wall alongside the front door, and on my pressing the bell I was almost instantly confronted by a massively-built commissionaire, behind whose stalwart figure I could discern a brightly-lit hall where another liveried functionary was presiding behind a counter.

Having scrutinized Suzanne's card, which I produced for his inspection, the door-keeper handed it back and waved me forward.

"That will be quite all right, sir. Perhaps you will be kind enough to sign the book."

Presenting him with half a crown I crossed over to the reception desk, and having inscribed "A. Russell" in a bulky leather-bound volume, handed my hat and coat to an attendant page boy. Through an open doorway on the right came the jerky blare of a dance band, accompanied by a confused medley of laughter and chatter. Two or three bored-looking young men in dinner jackets were standing about smoking cigarettes and apparently waiting for their belated partners.

As I entered the large main room the saxophones suddenly stopped bleating, and at the same instant the slowly-gyrating throng that packed the square space in the centre began

to break up into its component couples. Most of them drifted back to the array of small supper tables which surrounded three sides of the dance floor, while the remainder headed for the long horseshoe-shaped bar at the further end, where a couple of white-coated negroes, with rolling eyes and flashing teeth, were busily occupied in mixing drinks and manipulating cocktail shakers.

For a minute or so I stood just inside the doorway looking round in search of Suzanne. Once I thought I had caught a glimpse of her, but a second glance immediately disillusioned me. She was certainly not amongst the supper crowd, and with a sudden uneasy feeling that something might have prevented her from keeping her appointment, I began to saunter slowly in the direction of the bar.

I was about half-way across the room when I ran slap into Bobby Ford. He was coming directly towards me, so there was no possible chance of escape. As his eyes met mine he gave a slight start, and almost simultaneously I saw his round, rather vacant face brighten up into a surprised grin. With an inward curse I pulled myself together to face the situation.

"Well I'm jiggered, if it isn't Alan Reid!" He stood gaping at me fatuously. "Why, this is too utterly marvellous! Just asking about you yesterday, and some silly chump said that you were out in Spain writing a book."

I smiled at him politely. "I am afraid you are making a mistake," I said. "My name is Russell."

The change in his expression was so ludicrous that I almost burst out laughing.

"I say, I'm frightfully sorry. Taken my oath you were a pal of mine—chap called Reid who used to have rooms below me at Oriel. Most extraordinary likeness I ever saw."

"Nothing to apologise about," I replied. "Did the same thing myself once over in New York. Walked up and tackled a fellow who turned out to be a complete stranger."

"Makes one feel a bit of a fool, what?" He paused and stared at me again. "Of course there are differences now I come to look at you. You're thinner to start with, and

and a good deal more sunburnt. Thought that was because you'd been out abroad."

"It probably is," I gave a slight shrug. "I've been collecting orchids in Brazil for the last two years, and it's one of those jobs that's apt to leave its mark."

"Orchids, eh!" He raised his eyebrows. "I say, that must be fearfully interestin'."

"Well, it has its moments," I admitted. "The trouble is that it takes one right out of civilization. I've been away so long that almost everyone I knew in London seems to have disappeared."

"Sounds a bit depressin'. Look here, how about coming along and having a drink?"

"Thanks, I will. Nice of you to suggest it." The humour of the thing was beginning to appeal to me.

"Dashed funny coincidence, what? Must celebrate it somehow or other."

Grinning again amiably, Bobby turned towards the bar. He was evidently just the same good-natured ass that he had always been, and thanking Providence that I had not had the ill fortune to blunder up against some sharper-witted acquaintance, I followed in his trail as he led the way forward. This certainly promised to be more entertaining than hanging about on my own waiting for Suzanne.

"I'll get the drinks," announced Bobby generously. "You collar that pew over there."

He nodded towards a vacant sofa standing against the wall, and obeying his instructions I edged across and took possession of it. After a brief interval he re-appeared with a couple of whiskies, one of which he handed to me.

"Well, here's fun and all that sort of thing!" He deposited himself on the seat alongside. "Feel I need bracin' up after a shock like that. Positively staggerin' your likeness to Reid—might be his twin brother."

"I shall have to be careful what I do if I've got a double walking around loose." I laughed. "What kind of a bloke is he?"

"Damn fine scout." Bobby took a long drink. "Got his blue for boxing, and took all sorts of honours as well. Bit

above my weight in the brain line, but not one of those blighters who keep pushing it down your throat. Nothin' of that about old Alan. Why, if you barged into him by accident you'd just put him down as one of us."

"I've a feeling we should have a good deal in common," I observed. "I'd like to meet him some day."

"I'll introduce you when he comes back if you're still around. Love to watch his face when I trot you up."

As he spoke his glance wandered across to the end of the room, and following its direction I caught sight of Suzanne coming in through the doorway. She was wearing a low cut evening frock which toned in charmingly with the golden brown of her eyes and hair. Beside her lounged a tall, red-faced man in the middle thirties, a man who had the vague but unmistakable mark of the race-course stamped all over his unpleasing personality. I looked at his long, prominent, rather brutal jaw with appreciative interest. It struck me as being the ideal jaw on which to plant a really devastating right-hander.

"Hullo, hullo!" exclaimed Bobby. "Here's Susie Despard coming along to give us a song."

"Is she any good?" I enquired carelessly.

"Any good!" he echoed. "Easy enough to see that you've been out in the wilds. Why, she's all the noise at the moment—brightest bit of stuff that André's dug up for ages."

"Who's the tough-looking gent with her?" I asked.

"Vince Grantley, the bookie. Hope she isn't pairing off with him. Much too pretty for a thug like that, even if he is dripping with cash."

Moving forward with her escort, Suzanne took a seat at one of the small tables. A moment later the conductor of the band rapped briskly with his baton, and almost immediately the crowd in front of the bar began to drift back towards the dance floor, and form up into a compact and chattering audience.

"How about it?" suggested Bobby, hoisting himself to his feet. "Like to join the giddy throng and have a squint at her. She's quite easy on the eye, as they say in the films."

We took up our position at the back, and between the intervening heads I watched Suzanne step out gracefully into the centre. The band broke into a kind of barbaric discord, and the next instant I was listening entranced to a beautiful low contralto voice which held the whole of that half-drunken throng in a rapt and motionless silence. As it died away a storm of applause filled the big room. There were enthusiastic shouts for an encore, and switching into a totally different style Suzanne treated us to a somewhat daring effort in the typical night club vein, that brought a chorus of sniggering chuckles from her delighted admirers. It was obviously part of the job, and if I hadn't been so fond of her I should probably have found it more amusing.

During the renewed acclamations that followed I turned round to speak to Bobby. I discovered that he had been intercepted by a platinum blonde, and leaving him in her clutches I slipped out unobtrusively and made my way back to the sofa. Whether Suzanne had noticed me or not it was impossible to say. Once or twice she had glanced straight in my direction, but on each occasion I had failed to detect even the faintest glimmer of recognition.

I had been sitting down for some little while smoking a cigarette and wondering what I should do next, when an impassive-looking waiter, who had apparently been heading for the bar, pulled up unexpectedly alongside the couch.

"Excuse me, sir," he remarked in a whisper, "are you Mr. Russell—Mr. Alan Russell?"

"That's right," I admitted.

"I was asked to give you this, sir."

With a furtive gesture he slid something into my hand, and accepting the two-shilling piece that I had succeeded in unearthing, faded off again in the same discreet fashion. The whole incident had only occupied a few seconds.

Glancing down I found myself in possession of a small piece of screwed-up paper which appeared to have been torn out of an address book. I unfolded it surreptitiously, bringing to light a few words written in pencil. They had been scribbled so hurriedly that I had some difficulty in making them out.

Please come up to the top landing at a quarter past twelve exactly. Will meet you there. S.

Automatically I jerked back my sleeve and consulted my wrist watch. It was eight minutes after midnight. As far as I could perceive no one was taking the faintest interest in my movements, and getting up leisurely I stuffed the message into my pocket. The band had started to play again, and a number of couples were already trooping back on to the dance floor.

Amongst these were Bobby and his blonde, and hoping that he was too occupied to notice my departure I edged slowly along the wall until I had regained my former position just inside the doorway. At this point I came to a stop, and under cover of lighting a fresh cigarette took a rapid survey of the hall. The only person in view was the liveried attendant in the reception office who was lounging over his counter studying the evening paper.

Waiting until it was precisely two minutes to the quarter I stepped out boldly and headed for the staircase. The fellow never even so much as raised his head, and having arrived at the first landing without being challenged I found myself confronted by a second narrow and cheaply-carpeted flight which seemed oddly out of keeping with the general magnificence of the rest of the establishment. It evidently led to a private region into which visitors were not expected to intrude.

All that met my eyes when I reached the top was a short empty passage with a couple of doors on either side. The two on the right were both labelled, one being inscribed "Ladies Toilette" and the other "W.C. Gents." There was something about this delicate distinction in wording which appealed to my sense of humour, and I was just stifling an involuntary laugh when Suzanne emerged silently from one of the rooms opposite. The next instant she was beside me and I could feel her hand pressing against my arm.

"Listen, Alan. You mustn't stop long. Someone might come up."

"It's safe enough for the moment," I replied. "What's happened? Why did you send for me?"

"I have promised Grantley that I will go to his house to-morrow night. I thought I ought to let you know at once in case you wanted to tell your friend."

"To-morrow night!" I echoed. "That doesn't leave us much time."

"He made such a special point of it I was afraid to refuse. His servant will be away, and if I had tried to put it off he might have become suspicious." She paused. "You see, I have been encouraging him. It—it almost made me sick, but there was no other way."

"You ought to have the V.C.," I said. "It's been handed out for much less heroic actions."

"You saw him? You saw him when he came in with me?"

I nodded.

"Do you think you are strong enough to knock him down?"

"Amplly," I assured her. "A jaw like that is an absolute gift. He'll just curl up quietly and go to sleep."

"It must be fine to be a man." She looked up at me, her eyes shining. "I have often wished that I was one."

"I should be horribly annoyed if you were." I bent down and kissed her fingers. "Tell me," I continued, "what time do you expect to arrive at the house?"

"About eleven, I should think. We are having supper first at the Milan. I could keep him talking, and make it a little later if you like."

"No, that will do all right. I was only thinking about getting in. I don't want to be seen climbing up a drain pipe in broad daylight."

"This man you call 'Tubby'—are you quite certain that he will be ready to help us?"

"Unless I'm hopelessly out of my reckoning he'll jump at it with both feet. I'll toddle along there now and look him up. He lives quite close by—some back street in Soho."

At that moment there was a rumble of men's voices down below, and a door on the next landing banged loudly. Drawing in a quick breath Suzanne released my arm.

"You must go," she whispered "Ring me up in the morning and we will arrange to meet somewhere. Then you can let me know if there is anything special that you want me to do."

"There's only one thing that really matters," I replied. "I can tell you that now."

"What is it?"

I stood for a moment looking down into her eager, up-turned face.

"Just go on being yourself," I said simply.

The street cleaner paused in his labours, and leaning on the handle of his brush tilted back his cap. "There's a little Eyetalian joint o' that name in Owen's Court. Would that be it?"

"I expect so," I replied.

"Well, there you are, guv'nor." He jerked his head towards a turning on the opposite side of the road. "Keep strytle on till you come to the Boar's 'Ead and then cut up to the left, see? Won't take you more'n five minutes, not from 'ere."

I expressed my thanks, and following the instructions he had given me plunged into a narrow and rather unsavoury-looking street, lined on either side by what appeared to be small shops and restaurants. The majority of these showed no sign of life, though here and there some perspiring and partially clad alien was lounging silently in a lighted doorway enjoying a final cigarette before turning in. The hot, still air was filled with the mingled fragrance of pickled onions, stale cabbage and unwashed humanity.

Wondering what had induced Tubby to pitch his camp in such an odoriferous neighbourhood, I continued my way past a succession of heaped-up dust bins until I arrived at The Boar's Head. Owen's Court, a short *cul-de-sac* some twenty yards in length, proved to be entirely deserted. On the other side, about four houses along, I could see the name PARELLI painted in block lettering above a shuttered window. With the exception of one of the top rooms, the whole front of the place was in darkness, and crossing over to



the side door. To the left of the entrance I peered at the two bells decorated on the wall. Underneath the second was one of those little metal strips which can be obtained from a penny-in-the-slot machine. It was stamped with the solitary word "Green."

I pressed hopefully, and after a brief pause I heard a faint sound somewhere above my head. Stepping backwards into the gutter and glancing up at the same time, I perceived Tubby's head and shoulders protruding from the lighted window. On catching sight of me he gave a low whistle.

"Corlucus, if it ain't the Professor."

With an abrupt jerk he disappeared from view, and in less time than it takes to write the words there was a shuffle of descending footsteps followed by the sharp click of a bolt. The next instant the door opened, revealing a tousle-headed figure in vest and trousers.

"Hullo, Tubby!" I said. "Sorry to rout you out at this hour. Wanted to have a chat with you if it's not too late."

"That's O.K. Always welcome any time, you are." Hitching up his trousers he motioned me to step inside. "'Adn't turned in proper not yet—too blinkin' 'ot. Jest lyin' on the bed 'avin' a bit of a read." He closed the door, and having refastened the bolt, led the way towards the foot of a grimy-looking staircase. "Gimme a reg'lar start when the bell went," he continued. "Thought at first it might be that crazy chump, young Davy." He looked back over his shoulder. "Mind out when you come to the fourth step; there's a 'ole at the side you can shove your foot through."

Pursued by a strong smell of garlic, I followed him up two rickety flights, emerging at last on to a small, uncarpeted landing at the top of the house. An open door faced us, and from inside came the shrill twittering of a canary. With a sudden grin Tubby cocked his head on one side and listened.

"Woke the little barstard up jest after 'e'd got off. Damning our eyes for us, that's wot 'e's a doin' of." Stepping forward he snapped his fingers in the direction of the cage which was standing on a chest of drawers alongside the window.

"All right, chum, no need to turn narsty. On' gen'leman friend o' mine popped in for a drink. You sh'ld put your 'ead under your wing 'an cut out some o' them 'ar words."

In the light of a bare electric lamp suspended from the ceiling I stood looking curiously round the room. It was really a large attic the side walls of which sloped down to about five feet from the floor. Apart from the chest of drawers the furniture consisted of a bed in one corner, a big, untidy table in the centre, two or three battered suitcases piled on top of each other, and a couple of very dilapidated arm-chairs standing in front of the fireplace. Nailed up on the walls were about half a dozen coloured pictures of famous race-horses which looked as though they had been given away as a supplement by some sporting journal.

"Wot's your fancy, Professor—beer or whisky?" Tubby was moving across towards a built-in cupboard. "Plenty o' both as it 'appens, so you needn't be shy o' givin' it a name."

"Better stick to whisky," I replied. "I've just been having one at a place called The Merry Andrew."

"Night club, ain't it?" Producing a bottle, a syphon and a couple of tumblers, he came back and dumped them on the table. "Didn't know you were partial to that sorter thing."

"I'm not," I assured him. "I went there strictly on business, I had a tip that our friend Vince Grantley would probably be on tap."

"Oh, you did, eh?" Tubby's eyes narrowed, and tilting out a couple of generous helpings he presented me with one of the glasses.

"Felt I'd better run the rule ov' 'em, him and find out exactly what we're up against. He's a nasty-looking customer, but I think I can do the trick all right. Only a matter of getting in the first punch."

"Wouldn't run no risks, not if I were you. I'd take a spanner to 'im."

"I don't want to crack his skull; that would land us all in the soup. My idea is just to keep him nice and quiet until we've gone through the safe and cleared off."

"P'raps you're right. When's it to be?"

"To-morrow night. I saw the girl for a few minutes, and she told me she'd fixed up to have supper with him at the Milan and to go back to his house afterwards. They'll probably turn up about eleven."

"Where's 'is place—St. John's Wood, ain't it?"

I pulled out the slip of paper which Suzanne had given me on our way back from Hampstead. "Six Willow Road, one of those quiet little backwaters up behind Lord's. It's a small, old-fashioned house with a bit of garden."

"Sounds easy, that's to say if there ain't no skivvies messin' around."

"There's only one, a man servant, and he'll be out for the night." I paused. "What time do you think we ought to get up there? I should say about a quarter past ten for choice."

"Somewhere around then. Too bloomin' light now to start in any earlier." Tubby sat silent for a moment frowning thoughtfully. Then his face suddenly brightened. "Tell you wot, there's a little boozer just round the corner—call it The Red Lion, if I remember right. 'Ow about us meetin' in the saloon, say at a quarter to?"

"That will suit me," I agreed. "More comfortable than hanging about outside, especially if it happens to be raining."

"Pity we can't take young Davy along with us. Give 'is ruddy soul to be in on this, I'll bet 'e would."

"If that story of yours is true," I objected, "it would be a bit too risky. He'd probably have another shot at sticking a knife into the swine."

"Wouldn't put it past 'im." Tubby shrugged. "Always sayin' 'e'll do something of the sort afore 'e conks out. 'Ave to be quick about it, though, or I reckon 'e won't get the chance."

"How do you mean," I enquired.

"'E's in a bad way, Davy. Started spittin' blood 'e 'as!"

"Poor devil," I muttered. "If he can only hang on long enough I'll pay his expenses across to Bordeaux so that he can see our friend guillotined. They do it in public over there."

Tubby's eyes opened.

"Blimey, you don't say so?" He paused for an instant, and then broke into a sudden chuckle. "Why, if that gets round amongst the boys they'll 'ave to run a blinkin' excursion!"

## CHAPTER VIII

It was exactly twelve minutes to ten when I pushed open the door of The Red Lion, and I was just in time to hear the landlord's remark as he stepped back to the cash register and rang up the change.

"Well, I don't altogether 'old with that, Mr. B. You can't beat England, not to my way of thinking. Wot I says is why not stop in it."

"'Ear, 'ear!" chipped in another voice. "Spend your money in yer own country, and then everyone gets the benefit of it. That's common sense."

A quick glance round showed me that Tubby had not yet arrived. Except for the three customers clustered round the host and an enormous elderly man who was sitting in a corner by himself, the small, brightly-lit bar contained no other occupants. Its most noticeable feature was a life-sized portrait of King Edward the Seventh somewhat ineffectively disguised as a British Field Marshal.

As I came forward the landlord raised his head and moved along to attend to me. I ordered a whisky and soda, and establishing myself on a stool picked up an evening paper which was lying on the counter. I was relieved to see that none of the others appeared to be paying me the slightest attention.

"That's all very well," observed the gentleman known as Mr. B., "but there's other things to be considered besides what you might call the Ecernomic aspeck. Can't get away from the fact that travel broadens the mind."

"Take old George there," interposed a second. "'E's knocked around a bit, an' see 'ow broad 'e is."

There was a general laugh.

"Done all the travellin' I want," grunted the big man in

the corner. "Sixteen years in the Marines I was, an' never more'n eighteen months on the same station. Reckon I seen all the earth an' all the sea—the top an' the bottom of it."

The landlord raised his eyebrows. "'Ow's that, George? Done a bit o' diving in your time?"

"Divin'!" repeated the big man scornfully, "not likely. I'm talkin' now of when I was a youngster. Went down in the *Victoria* I did that time she was rammed by the *Camperdowne*. Maybe you've never 'eard of it."

"Course I 'ave. Remember my dad readin' it outter the paper." The speaker paused. "Well, well, well, so you was in 'er, eh?"

"What did it feel like, George," enquired Mr. B.

"Feel like!" The big man removed his pipe. "Why, I was a standin' on deck alongside a mate o' mine, an' I seed the *Camperdowne* comin' straight for us. 'She's goin' to 'it us,' I says. 'No she ain't,' 'e says. 'Yus she is,' says I. 'She's goin' to 'it us, an' I'll get a cold,' I says, 'cos I always 'ave a cold when I gets wet.' Well, I was right, see! In she came, crash, bang, wallop and down we went."

"'Ow fer did you go yourself?" enquired the landlord.

"Miles. Leastways it seemed miles, and when I come up there was 'undreds o' me mates chokin' and' strugglin' an' drownin' all round me."

"Cool!" murmured someone. "Must 'ave upset yer a bit."

"Not 'arf it didn't. 'George,' I says to myself, 'you'll 'ave a cold, me boy.' And I 'ad. The worst blinkin' cold I ever 'ad in me life."

Everyone present broke into a simultaneous guffaw, and at the same instant the door opened and Tubby made his appearance. He slipped in quietly and walking forward to the bar without taking any notice of me waited in silence until the general merriment had subsided. Then, planking down a shilling, he asked for a pint of bitter.

"Have to neck it quick," remarked the landlord as he reached up for a tankard. "We'll be shutting down in another three minutes."

"Jest in time, as the sayin' is." Tubby grinned affably, and pocketing his change proceeded to bury his face in the

mug. Still chuckling, one of the other customers took hold of the big man's glass and pushed it across the counter.

"Fill up ole George's at the same time, Bill," he commanded. "Long as it's inside he don't mind how wet he gets."

The witticism produced a fresh outbreak of merriment, under cover of which I slid down from my stool and headed for the door. It was clear from Tubby's actions that he considered it inadvisable to betray the fact that we had met by appointment. He evidently intended to join me outside, and assuming he would realize that I had cottoned on to his idea I deliberately refrained from even so much as a backward glance.

When I came out on to the pavement I discovered that the street lamps were already alight. The sky was overcast by a thick layer of cloud which had been creeping up from the west, and to judge by the ominous and slightly yellowish gloom there was every prospect of an immediate downpour. Well, if it were going to rain, so much the better. Unlike George, I had no pathological terror of getting wet, and in view of the somewhat delicate mission ahead of us, the fewer people we found loitering about the neighbourhood the more healthy and promising our prospects appeared to be.

A little further along stood an empty private house with a front porch sheltering the entrance. It struck me that this would be a good place in which to take refuge, and so turning up my collar and buttoning my coat I set off promptly through the gathering dusk. I had barely arrived at my goal before the first large drops were splashing down into the roadway.

As I had expected, Tubby was not long in following me. Glancing back towards the pub I saw a small, solitary figure step out and peer swiftly up and down the street. The slightest movement of my arm was sufficient to attract his attention. With an answering wave he came hurrying forward, and the next minute he had dived in alongside of me and was wiping the moisture from the back of his neck.

"You 'ain't 'alf picked the right night, Professor." He chuckled softly. "No call to worry about the cops. They'll

all be inside somewhere, lappin' up the beer and cuddlin' the skivvies."

"In a just cause like ours," I replied, "one expects to receive a little assistance. That's what Providence is for."

"Wouldn't suprise me." His grin broadened. "Thought we'd better not *chum up inside, not in front o' them locals*. If it gets around to-morrer that there's been trouble at Vince's place one of 'em might tell the coppers that there was a couple o' strangers 'obnobbin' in there jest on closin' time."

"More than likely. Some people have a mania for butting in where they're not wanted." I looked out at the rain which was now pelting down viciously. "I think we might give it a few minutes," I added. "They won't be showing up before eleven and——"

"No point in drownin' ourselves, as you say." Tubby coughed apologetically. "Matter o' fact I've 'ad a squint round already. That's why I was a bit late."

"You've been to the house?" I demanded.

"Well, it was like this, Professor. "'Fore we started in on the job proper I reckoned there wouldn't be no 'arm in makin' sure that the crib was empty. So I pops along there jest now on me own and gives a tinkle at the bell, see?"

"Oh, you did, did you!" I paused. "Suppose someone had answered it?"

"Only 'ad to ask if they wanted their winders cleanin'." He shrugged. "All O.K. as it turned out. Not a soul in the place from the looks of it, so I slips down the side path and I does wot *they calls a spot o' snoopin'*. Blimey, it's as easy as fallin' off a log! There's a little winder there be'ind the shrubs wot a baby in arms could prise open. Won't say as it's big enough for you to get through, not with your shoulders, but gimme a couple o' minutes, an' you can walk in at the back door like a gen'leman."

"Good work, Tubby," I said. "All the same, I wouldn't have let you do it if you'd told me. There's no reason why you should run a lot of unnecessary risk."

"Risk me foot! I'm in on this, saime as you and the young laidy. We're all out to get the perisher, an' if it's a matter o' goin' to clink we'll make a ruddy party of it."

As he was speaking the first violence of the storm suddenly began to slacken. The persistent drumming gave place to a kind of desultory patter, and moving a pace forward he peered out into the deserted roadway.

"'Ow about it?" he enquired. "Naow's the chance 'fore that bunch in there get goin'. Won't take us five minutes, not if we step out."

"Let's hop along then," I agreed. "There'll probably be a gas fire and a bottle of whisky in the place."

"Strewth, why didn't I think o' that?" Tubby slapped his leg. "Cigars, too," he added cheerfully, "woppin' big cigars with gold bands round 'em. Lumme, Professor, we're in for a blinkin' picnic!"

Without further discussion, we sallied forth from our refuge, and, making our way across the street, hurried up the side turning that led into Willow Road. Except for a luxurious limousine which whizzed past us with contemptuous indifference we appeared to have St. John's Wood entirely to ourselves. The rain seemed to have driven everybody indoors, and as we rounded the corner of the quiet *cul-de-sac* in which Grantley's villa was situated the silence was only broken by the sound of our own feet and a monotonous *drip, drip* from the overhanging trees. Here and there, in the semi-darkness, a solitary square of light gleamed out from some upstairs bedrooms.

"That's 'is 'ouse by the pillar box," muttered Tubby. "Don't stand lookin' round when we get there: just nip in sharp and foller me."

Resigning the leadership into his more experienced hands, I obediently carried out my instructions. Two or three more paces brought us to a small iron gate which opened into a square patch of crazy-paved garden. From here a short stretch of gravel led up to the front door, and then branching off to the left through a miniature shrubbery continued its course towards the back of the house. A notice, consisting of a pointing hand and the curt announcement "Tradesmen", was affixed to the adjacent wall.

We had advanced about half-way down this gloomy side path when my companion came to a halt. On our right,



behind a struggling growth of laurel, I could see the narrow outline of a ground floor window. At the point where we stood we were completely screened from observation, and extracting a short steel jemmy from his breast pocket Tubby raised himself on tiptoe and put his mouth close to my ear.

"Wait at the end there," he whispered, "and don't show yerself till I open the door. Mind out for the dustbin, or you'll fetch up against it and knock the lid off."

I nodded silently, and, leaving him to get on with the job, groped my way forward as far as the corner. Beyond this lay a small piece of neglected lawn overlooked by an array of back windows which apparently belonged to the houses facing the Red Lion. The rain was still coming down in a steady drizzle, and every now and then I could feel a little escaping rivulet trickling playfully from the brim of my hat.

After a surprisingly short interval the faint creak of a key turning in a lock suddenly reached my ears. With an exultant thrill I crept out from my hiding-place, and, skirting cautiously round a dark object which I took to be the dustbin, found myself confronted by an open door. The next instant Tubby had gripped hold of my arm and I was being pulled forward into what appeared to be a stone-floored passage.

"Wot did I tell yer?" he demanded triumphantly. "'Ere we are all merry and bright, and the 'ole bloomin' joint to ourselves." He switched on his torch, revealing an inner door covered in green baize. "Nice an' early too," he chuckled complacently. "Plenty o' time to fix things up before 'is lordship walks in on us."

Stepping briskly ahead, he ushered me into a fair-sized front hall, from one end of which an uncarpeted oak staircase led up to the landing above. There were several rooms opening out of it, and by the aid of the torch I was able to see that the nearest on the left had been fitted up as a kind of office study. Just beyond it was a small alcove for coats and hats partially concealed by a half-drawn curtain.

"That's your mark, Professor." Tubby was pointing to the recess in question. "All you need do is to stand in there, see? I'll be over the way, and soon as the blighter's shut the

door I'll shuffle me foot. 'E'll look round for certain, and that'll be your chance. If it was me I'd take the jemmy to 'im, but seein' as it's your show——"

"I think we'll stick to our original programme," I interrupted. "It's more in my line, and it will give me such a lot of pleasure." I pulled out my own torch and took a pace towards the study. "Suppose we have a look in here," I continued. "I expect he keeps everything locked up, but there's no harm in trying our luck."

Advancing across the threshold, with Tubby in close attendance, I swung the light round in a semi-circle. It revealed a big leather settee, some comfortable arm-chairs, an American roll-top desk, a table set out with sandwiches and drinks, and last, but not least, a ponderous-looking safe, which appeared to be clamped against the opposite wall. The window curtains were drawn, and the whole place had a faint odour of stale cigar smoke.

"Naow I calls that real 'andsome." With an approving nod Tubby strode to the table and picked up one of the bottles. "'Macintosh's Special,' he read out. "'Very old liqueur.' Looks as if 'e'd guessed we was comin', and wanted to do us proud."

"Go easy with it," I cautioned him. "We can't afford to get reckless."

"Only just a drop to keep the damp out." He was already extracting the cork. "Wouldn't be good manners not to taiste it: might 'urt 'is feelings."

"I'll have one later," I said. "I'm going to inspect that desk while I've got the chance."

I crossed over and seating myself in the chair switched on the small green shaded lamp beside me. I was confronted by a number of pigeon holes, most of them carelessly stuffed full of letters and receipted bills. In addition to these another pile of correspondence was spread out flat under a huge paper weight, and setting about my task without the slightest scruple I began glancing hurriedly at the various signatures and headings. While I was thus engaged Tubby occupied himself by roaming about the room. I could hear him opening a cupboard and rummaging amongst its contents, but I

was too busily engaged in getting through my own job to take any particular notice of what he was doing. The one sound for which I kept my ears strained was the rumble of an approaching taxi.

"Nothing here that's any use to us," I announced at last. "Not likely to be, of course, or he wouldn't have left it unlocked." I swung round and let my eyes rest on the safe. "We must hope for better luck when we get that damned thing open."

"See wot I dug up." With a mischievous grin Tubby produced a fat bundle of cigars. "'Romeo and Juliets', that's the name of 'em, and you can betcher life they knocked 'im back 'arf a dollar apiece."

"Weren't you ever taught that it was wicked to steal?" I asked.

"This 'ain't stealin'. 'E'd be welcome to 'elp 'imself if 'e dropped in at my place." He returned the bundle to his pocket. "Wouldn't do to light up naow," he said regretfully. "Might get a whiff of it as 'e comes in."

I glanced at my watch. "I think it's about time we took up our battle stations," I observed. "They're not supposed to arrive till eleven, but we can't count on that as an absolute certainty."

"May as well be on the saife side, any'ow." Tubby turned back to the table and picking up his glass finished off its contents. "'Ow about this young laidy o' yours?" he enquired. "Think she'll 'ave the sense to keep outer your way?"

"You leave it to her," I said briefly.

I switched off the desk lamp, and after a last look round led the way back into the hall. Now that the critical moment was at hand I felt oddly cool and confident. It was exactly as though some inner voice were assuring me that everything would work out according to plan. I had had the same sensation once or twice before in my life, and on each occasion the results had proved eminently satisfactory.

Putting on his torch again Tubby walked over and pushed open the door of a lavatory. Judging by its position I assumed that it was the undignified channel through which he had made his entrance.

"Better off than you I'll be. Got a nice cosy seat to sit on." He closed the window behind him and then directed his light on the half-curtained alcove. "Think there's enough room in there? If not we can bung out some of the stuff."

I measured the available space with my eye. "I'll be all right, I replied. "The only point we've got to worry about is timing the thing properly. I think the best moment for you to attract his attention will be directly he turns on the light. Sure to do that as soon as he's shut the door."

"You've 'it it." Tubby nodded. "I'll just scrape me boot like this, see!"

"That'll do the trick. He's dead certain to look round, and then it will be up to me. If I happen to miss with the first punch don't try to butt in. I'll get him as long as you don't interfere."

"I believe yer. I ain't forgot that one you 'anded out to Steve Molini!"

With a reminiscent chuckle Tubby retreated into his fastness, and following his example I stepped in behind the curtain. As I had expected I found I could make myself fairly comfortable without betraying my presence.

Standing there in the rather stuffy darkness, the only sound I could hear was the steady ticking of a clock. It was one of those loud, relentless ticks which seem to shape themselves into words, and before long the persistent refrain, "*they're coming soon, they're coming soon, they're coming soon*" began hammering through my brain, as though I were listening to a human voice. It got on my nerves to such an extent that I even tried stuffing my ears with my fingers.

After what appeared to be an interminable interval the tension was suddenly snapped by a warning "hist" from Tubby. At the same instant the faint murmur that I had already caught swelled into the unmistakable drone of a taxi engine. A second or so later there was a squelching scrape on the wet roadway, abruptly followed by a wicked grinding of brakes.

Drawing in a deep breath I laid my hand lightly on the curtains. An altercation seemed to be going on outside—a mutter of angry voices which rose and fell in a kind of

threatening snarl. Then the front gate creaked and footsteps began ascending the path.

"Drunken swine! Nearly as possible had us over. If I'd been alone——"

A key grated in the lock, and I was conscious of a waft of damp air. With it came a laugh, a low, musical laugh, that sent the blood dancing through my heart. Almost simultaneously the door closed, and with a sudden click the whole hall and staircase sprang into light.

After that things happened so rapidly that my recollections are a trifle blurred. What I remember best is Grantley's expression as he jerked round from facing the lavatory. I can't describe it, but I have seen the same startled and murderous fury in the eyes of a trapped pole-cat.

Before he could so much as raise his hands, however, I was well within distance. There was no mercy in my heart, and putting every ounce of weight I possessed behind the blow I let drive with my right. It landed on exactly the correct spot, and crumpling up like a punctured bladder he slumped down with a crash that shook the floor. For a moment I stood staring stupidly at my own knuckles.

"Thank you, Alan. That was splendid—absolutely splendid!" It was Suzanne speaking, and her voice was amazingly quiet and steady.

"Blinkin' marvel, ain't 'e?" Tubby had emerged from his hiding place. "Waistin' 'is time writin' books, that's wot I say. Ought to take it up serious an' 'ave a cut at Joe Louis."

With a belated effort I pulled myself together. "This," I remarked, "is my friend Mr. Green."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss." Tubby grinned affably.

"It was very kind of you to come and help us. I am more grateful than I can tell you." Stepping forward Suzanne peered down at the sprawling figure on the floor. "How long do you think he will stop like this?" she enquired.

"Quite a while," I assured her. "All the same, we'd better get a move on."

Without wasting time I dropped down on one knee, and heaving Grantley over with scant ceremony grabbed hold of the fine steel chain, the end of which was protruding from his

trouser pocket. Out came a small bunch of oddly-shaped keys, and having hastily unbuttoned the loop by which they were attached I jumped up again and handed them to Suzanne.

"Your privilege, Partner," I said. "I wouldn't rob you of it for anything in the world."

I was rewarded by a smile that left me feeling slightly intoxicated, but before either of us could speak again Tubby had broken into the conversation.

"Guess I'll stay here and keep an eye on the blighter." He pulled out his jemmy. "If 'e should 'appen to come round I'll give 'im a tap with this."

"Well, don't tap too hard," I suggested. "Everything has gone swimmingly so far, and it would be a nuisance to have a corpse on our hands at the last minute." I turned to Suzanne. "I'll go ahead and shove on the light. We needn't worry about the desk: I've had a look through that already."

A moment or so later we were kneeling side by side in front of the big green safe. In swift succession she tried one key after the other, and at the fourth attempt a little gratifying click told us that we had got hold of the right one. All that was needed was a sharp twist of the handle. With a faint swishing sound like a protesting gasp the massively-constructed door swung open, and as we bobbed forward simultaneously our two heads came into collision.

Facing us was a steel slab on which stood a number of account books. Underneath were a couple of locked drawers, and opening the first of these with feverish haste Suzanne emptied out its contents on to the carpet. Amongst a litter of papers were one or two loose diamonds which lay gleaming, incongruously, in the light of the lamp.

"There you are," I remarked, picking up the nearest. "Quite good stones, too, from the look of them. I wonder if he really meant to give you one."

"They must be part of what he stole," she whispered.

"You can't identify them I suppose?"

She shook her head. "Not as they are: you see, they have been taken out of their settings. The only ones there couldn't be any possible mistake about are the emeralds."

"No sign of them, unfortunately." We were peering into the second drawer which contained nothing but a bundle of used cheques.

"If there is anything that will help us it must be amongst these papers. We had better take them over to the light."

Leaving the diamonds where they were we gathered up the remainder of the stuff and carried it across to the desk. There was just enough room for the pair of us, and dividing our booty into two lots we set to work without further delay. Outside, behind the drawn curtains, the rain was still driving dismally against the windows.

I was nearly at the end of my consignment and had so far discovered nothing of the least interest when I suddenly came upon a communication from the Westminster Bank. It was a short typewritten letter, acknowledging the receipt of a metal box deposited with them for safe custody. The date went back nearly two years, and I was on the very point of showing it to Suzanne when with an odd, half-stifled exclamation she started up from her chair.

"What is it?" I demanded. "What have you found?"

"It's a passport—a passport made out in the name of Robert Norton!" She thrust the small, cloth-bound booklet into my hand. "Look, Alan, look—there is a photograph and a full description of him. 'Robert Ernest Norton, born at Cambridge, Stable Hand.' The address is 'Newmarket, England'."

"My sainted aunt!" I stood staring down at the long-jawed, brutal-looking face with the scrawled signature below. It was Grantley all right, though the portrait had evidently been taken when he was younger and less prosperous. 'Height six feet, hair dark brown, colour of eyes light blue'—everything was in order, and each detail added to the damning and convincing indictment.

"That ought to be good enough," I exclaimed. "If you make a statement to the French police and get it backed up by that doctor at Bordeaux I should imagine they'll be bound to act."

"I do not see how they can refuse." She took back the

passport, examined it for a moment with a kind of hungry satisfaction, and then slipped it carefully inside her blouse.

"Here's something else that may turn out useful," I remarked. "If he hasn't sold the emerald cross it's probably packed away in that box."

I handed her the letter, and as she began to read it I saw her fingers tighten.

"You are right," she whispered. "I am certain you are right. I will take it with me to Paris and give it to the police."

"Do you mean to snaffle the diamonds as well?"

She shook her head. "No, we will leave them in the safe: that will be the first place where he will look. When he sees that they are still there it will make him believe that nothing has been touched. He will think that you attacked him out of revenge—that you are the brother or the lover of some girl he has deceived and deserted."

"That's a bright idea." I looked at her admiringly. "We'll shove everything back exactly as we found it, and with any luck he'll never notice that the passport and the receipt are missing. "Come along, let's get it over. I shall feel a heap more comfortable when we're the other side of the Marylebone Road."

Collecting our two bundles of papers we packed them back neatly into the drawer. When I had arranged the diamonds on top there was nothing to suggest that the contents had been tampered with, and I can well remember the complacent optimism with which I re-closed the door and turned the key. Had I been able to foresee what lay in the immediate future—— However, as Mr. Kipling used to say, "that is another story."

When we emerged into the hall Tubby, who was squatting on the floor beside his prostrate charge, glanced up with an enquiring grin.

"Get wot you was after?" he demanded.

"Enough to go on with," I replied. "How about our host? Hope you haven't been experimenting with that jemmy."

He shook his head regretfully. "No call for it. You laid 'im out proper, you did. Ain't so much as blinked an eyelid."

"You don't think he's dead?" asked Suzanne anxiously.



"Dead me foot!" Tubby coughed. "Beg pardon, Miss. Wasn't meanin' to be rude."

"It's a colloquialism," I explained. "I don't know whether there is any exact equivalent for it in French."

"Jest 'avin' a nice little nap, that's all." With an expressive shrug our accomplice rose to his feet. "Might come round any minute naow, and when 'e do there won't 'alf be a lot o' blindin' an' cussin'. Corlucus, I'd give a quid to listen in."

"It would be highly entertaining if we could afford the time," I agreed. "As it is, we've got to beat it." I knelt down, and slipping back the bunch of keys into Grantley's pocket refastened the chain. "There we are," I continued, "all shipshape and Bristol fashion. Now switch off that light and come along with us. Doesn't matter about leaving the back door unlocked; he's not likely to have any more visitors to-night."

In single file we groped our way round the dust bin and up the side passage. The rain was still falling heavily, and on opening the front gate we were faced by a scene of comforting desolation. Unless a stray cat were lurking among the bushes there was not a living creature in sight.

"If you're wantin' a taxi," observed Tubby, "you'll have to get along to the main road. Pretty sure to pick one up there."

"How about you?" I enquired.

"I'll be all right. Pop into a train at Baker Street, see?" We were already half-way along the short stretch of pavement.

"But that's nonsense," I objected; "why on earth——"

"I can look after meself. You taike the young laidy 'ome, Professor: that's your job."

In spite of our joint protests he persisted in sticking obstinately to his decision, and, giving up further attempts to dissuade him, we hurried along in silence till we came out at the corner of Lord's Cricket Ground. Somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood a church clock was striking the half hour.

"Well, we're desperately obliged to you, Tubby," I said.

"It's been a grand night's work, and most of the credit is due

to you. If I'd tried to handle it on my own I'd probably have messed things up."

"You are a brave man, and a very true friend, Mr. Green." Suzanne offered him her hand. "When I come back from France I hope to be able to find some way of showing my gratitude."

Tubby beamed at her cheerfully. "That's O.K., Miss. Nothin' I wouldn't do for the Professor." He glanced at me. "I'd like to know 'ow you get on, and whether there's any chance o' slippin' it across that barstard. Maybe I could give you a look up to-morrer night when I get back from Kempton?"

"Do by all means," I said. "Make it about nine o'clock, and we'll go out somewhere and have a bit of supper."

As I spoke a belated taxi came swinging towards us along the main road, and stepping out into the gutter I signalled hopefully. In response the headlights made a sudden swerve, and much to my relief the driver began to slow down. By the time I turned round again Tubby had already vanished.

"Bit short on the juice, Guv'nor," wheezed a husky voice. "Which direction might you be wantin' to go?"

"Notting Hill Gate Station," I informed him. "I'll make it worth your while if you can run us as far as that."

"Just about manage it, I reckon."

"Good." With considerable thankfulness I jerked open the door, and, scrambling in after Suzanne, seated myself beside her. A moment later we were bowling briskly along Upper Baker Street.

"What happened to Tubby?" I demanded.

"He simply disappeared." She shrugged. "He is a queer little man, but there is something very nice about him. I believe he thought that we would rather be alone."

"He was perfectly correct as far as I'm concerned." I placed my dripping hat on the floor, and straightening up again took possession of her hand. "This is wonderful," I added. "I'd like to go on driving round with you all night."

"With the rain trickling down our backs?" she asked mischievously.

"It's stopped trickling in my case," I said. "It's collected into a nice little pool which I appear to be sitting in."

"Oh, but that sounds most uncomfortable." The corners of her lips twitched. "I am sorry that you should suffer so on my account."

"It's of no consequence," I assured her. "I would put up with anything now we've got hold of that passport."

The clasp of her hand tightened and her face suddenly became serious. "I knew that we should," she said quietly. "I have been certain of it from the first."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "Have you made up your mind?"

She nodded. "I have booked a seat on the morning plane to Paris. It arrives at midday, and if possible I shall fly straight on to Bordeaux. When I get there I shall go to the Préfet, tell him about Marie's confession, and show him what I have brought with me. After that"—she paused—"after that I cannot say what will happen. It will be for the police to decide."

I sat for a moment thinking furiously. "I don't like it, Suzanne," I said. "I wish to God I could come with you. Unfortunately there are one or two slight 'obstacles'."

"It makes no difference. I would not permit you to accompany me in any case. You have risked enough for my sake—more than enough. From now on your part in the affair is finished."

"On the contrary," I said firmly, "it's only just beginning. You don't imagine——"

"I did not mean that we should see no more of each other. I—I hope that we shall be friends always." She laughed a trifle shakily. "Have you forgotten that I have invited you to my flat, and that I have promised to cook the dinner?"

"Forgotten!" I repeated. "Why it's never been out of my mind except when I was asleep. Even then I've dreamed about it—beautiful dreams full of mushroom omelettes with your adorable little nose looking at me across the table."

"But you are so absurd." She laid her wet cheek lightly against my shoulder. "One does not see with one's nose. If one did I should always be looking at the sky."

I slid my arm around her and drew her a shade closer.

"Let me call for you after breakfast and take you down to Croydon," I suggested. "I'm worrying about what Grantley may do, and I should feel happier if I had seen you safely into the plane."

"No, no, I will not allow it. I will not drag you into this any further. We must not be seen together until the whole business is finished and done with."

Though I pleaded hard, all my attempts at persuading her to alter her mind were completely useless. The only concession she would make was a promise to send me a wire when she landed at Le Bourget, and with this somewhat unsatisfactory compromise I was eventually forced to content myself. By that time we had already turned into Lancaster Gate, and the long line of park railings were flitting by on our left.

"Well, I won't argue with you any more," I said sadly. "We shall have to get out in a minute, and I should hate to part in an atmosphere of contention. I should lie awake all night biting the bedclothes."

"But you must not do that: it might distress your landlady." She laughed softly, and looked up into my face. "One should not be selfish," she whispered. "If you think it would help to save her good linen sheets I do not even mind your kissing me."

I drew in a deep breath.

"It's worth trying anyhow," I agreed.

## CHAPTER IX

"It's just a drop of coffee." Mrs. Mudge deposited a cup and saucer on my already overcrowded table. "Seeing as you've been working all the morning I thought it would freshen you up."

"That was very sweet and noble of you." I pushed aside a bundle of notes and lighted a cigarette. "By the way," I added, "I hope I didn't wake you up last night. The

wind caught the door and it slammed before I could shut it."

"No, I hadn't actually dropped off." Her lips momentarily tightened. "I heard you come in, though, and if you'll pardon my saying so, I don't think you ought to go stopping out as late as that. What you need is plenty of rest and sleep."

"But I'm practically fit again, thanks to your good cooking." I took a long sip and smiled at her gratefully. "You mustn't imagine that I was out on the bust, Mrs. Mudge—nothing of the sort. I had arranged to meet someone and go through a whole lot of tiresome papers. It took us quite a long time to find what we were looking for."

"Well, you want to be careful. You may be feeling better, but when anyone's strained their constitution same as you have it's always apt to weaken the heart. I've known cases of people being took all of a sudden and dropping down dead in the street."

"Any particular street?" I inquired.

"No, just where they happened to be at the time." She threw a disapproving glance at my carefully assorted memoranda. "If I were you I'd put them away and take a nice little stroll in the Park. Then you can have your lunch and a lay down afterwards."

"I am going on with my work," I said firmly. "It's very important that I should get this stuff cleared up as soon as possible. I shall have to report to the University next week, and they'll want to know how I have been spending my time."

"You must do as you please, of course," returned Mrs. Mudge resignedly; "only don't say I didn't give you fair warning. If you wake up one day and find yourself in hospital maybe you'll remember my advice."

With a sombre shake of her head she took herself off, and swallowing another mouthful of coffee I got up and sauntered across to the window. Her untimely though well-meant intrusion had effectually distracted my train of thought, and somehow or other I found my mind drifting away to Croydon Airport and the little procession of slightly-excited travellers being shepherded politely across the tarmac. Amongst them

the figure of Suzanne stood out with extraordinary clearness. I could see the quiet determination on her face as she clambered into the plane, and I could picture her hand stealing up furtively to her breast in order to make sure that the damning evidence of Grantley's guilt was still in her possession.

For the twentieth time since we had parted the previous evening I tried to draw up a kind of mental balance sheet, and figure out what appeared to be the most likely developments. I had not much knowledge of French police procedure, but with the passport in their hands and Suzanne's and the doctor's statement before them it was surely impossible that they would decline to re-open the case. Their first step, I imagined, would be to communicate with Scotland Yard. This would mean an immediate and searching inquiry into the proceedings at Willow Road, and where such an investigation might lead to Heaven alone could say. For all Suzanne's resolve to keep my name out of the matter the chances of my being eventually dragged into it were sufficiently obvious. If that happened the whole of my story would have to be made public, and any further attempt at drawing the wool over the eyes of my employers could only result in complete and humiliating disaster. I should lose my appointment as a mere matter of course. I should be regarded as having blotted my copy book, beyond any hope of forgiveness, and unless I could find a publisher myself all the hard work I had done and the information I had collected would probably be thrown back on my own hands.

Unpleasant, however, as such an experience would be, it was not this particular maggot that was my chief worry. Thanks to Cousin Melville I was now in a position which would enable me to accept the censures of the University authorities with comparative tranquillity. Even if my hopes of an Academic career were finally blighted there would be nothing to prevent me from following my own line of studies. I could devote my time in complete comfort and freedom to any subject which happened to appeal to me. The wearisome burden of delivering lectures and wading through

examinations papers would be lifted from my shoulders, and if I were capable of making any useful contribution to the stock of human knowledge my opportunities for doing so appeared to be practically unlimited.

No, it was something much more important that was gnawing at my mind; it was the painful possibility of my being separated from Suzanne. How she intended to account to the police for her possession of Grantley's passport I was at a loss to imagine, but if the real facts came out, as they were almost bound to do, it seemed only too probable that she would find herself in trouble. The plea that the end justifies the means was not one which was likely to cut very much ice in an English court. Burglary and assault, even in an admittedly good cause, were still serious offences, and I could well visualize some smug-faced magistrate informing us that we had no right to take the law into our own hands, and virtuously committing us to prison as a deterrent example to others.

As far as I was concerned personally I cared little. After some of my experiences in Spain an English gaol would be comparatively comfortable, but the idea of Suzanne being cooped up with a parcel of shoplifters and prostitutes filled me, as I have said before, with a positively murderous resentment. It would be like putting a fresh picked lily into a dust bin, or smearing filth across some beautiful work of art.

Besides, although I had not yet mentioned the fact, I was desperately anxious that we should get married straight away. The arrest and extradition of Grantley on a capital charge would spur the sensational Press to some of their very choicest efforts, and what I wanted most of all was to take Suzanne off to some peaceful refuge until the storm of publicity had finally blown over. Then, as soon as that desirable state of affairs had come to pass, we could slip back unobtrusively to Bracken Hall. In a relatively short time the whole business would be forgotten and——

Who the devil was that?

A loud rap had suddenly startled me out of my reflections, and turning sharply I strode across to the door. The next

instant I was confronted by the plump and slightly breathless figure of my faithful friend Gertie.

"I wish you'd knock a little more gently," I observed. "You forget that I'm in a delicate state of health."

"Oh, if you please sir, there's a man downstairs who wants to see you. He's a funnysorter man and——"

"What's his name?" I cut in.

"Green, sir."

"Why, it must be Tubby," I exclaimed. "That's all right. Gertie. He's a friend of mine, and a very distinguished sportsman. Just trot along down and send him up, will you?"

She went off obediently, and almost before I had time to ask myself what this unexpected visit might portend, I heard a quick pad of footsteps ascending the stairs. The moment Tubby's face came in view I knew that something was seriously wrong.

"Hullo!" I said, "I thought you were at Kempton."

"So I oughter be." He jerked his head warningly in the direction of the ground floor, and then taking me by the arm began to push me back into the sitting room. I could see little beads of perspiration glistening on his upper lip.

"What's the trouble?" I demanded, as soon as the door was closed.

In response he dived into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled newspaper. It was an early edition of the *Star*, and unfolding it with feverish haste he thrust it into my hands.

"Read that piece on the front page."

He pointed to the right hand column, and as my eyes fell upon the headlines I felt as though someone had slipped a large lump of ice into my waistcoat.

## MURDER IN ST. JOHN'S WOOD

### WELL-KNOWN BOOKMAKER FOUND STABBED,

"Read it," he reiterated hoarsely. "See wot it says."

For an instant I stood there in petrified amazement, and then by a savage effort I forced myself to comply.



"In the very early hours of this morning a man named James Wilson, who acts as personal attendant to the well-known bookmaker, Mr. Vincent Grantley, and who had been spending the evening with some friends, returned to his employer's residence, Number 3 Willow Road, St. John's Wood. He found the back door standing open, and on making his way through into the front hall he was horrified to discover Mr. Grantley's dead body lying on the floor surrounded by a pool of blood. Although the weapon had been removed it was obvious that the unfortunate victim had been stabbed to the heart. Judging by appearances, the crime had been committed only a short time previously, and there was no indication of any attempt at robbery.

"The police were immediately summoned, and Detective Inspector Ward, of the Albany Street Division, who has taken control of the case, is already in possession of some important and sensational clues. We understand that a certain young lady, whose vocal talents are not unknown to the patrons of several of London's smartest night clubs, has been taken to the Albany Street Police Station where she is at present being detained for further inquiries. There is evidence that she was in the company of the deceased shortly before midnight, and it is believed that as a result of her statement an early arrest may be confidently expected.

"The late Mr. Grantley, who was one of the most recent recruits to the list of successful turf agents, had succeeded in a short time in building up a remarkably prosperous business. He was a well-known figure both on the race-course and in the West End of London, and the news of his sudden and tragic end will be received with deep regret by his many friends and acquaintances."

"But it's impossible!" The words broke from me automatically.

"Don't you believe it." Tubby gave vent to a singularly mirthless laugh. "Somebody's croaked 'im right enough, and wot's more, I know who's done it."

"You know?"

"Not 'alf!" Fumbling again in his pocket he dragged out a dirty slip of paper. "Found this in the letter box when I come downstairs. Note from Davy. Blasted young fool must 'ave got some pal to bring it round for 'im."

Still feeling slightly dazed, I grabbed hold of the unsavoury-looking missive. It consisted of a half sheet, apparently torn out of a penny exercise book. The pencilled writing was so faint and shaky that I could scarcely make it out.

"Won't be able to come to-day. Too ill. Reckon this is the end, but what's the odds? Got my own back as you'll be seeing in the papers so I don't give a curse. Keep your trap shut if you can for the sake of Mother. D."

"Must 'ave sneaked up there just after we left." Tubby wiped away the perspiration with his coat sleeve. "Knew 'e was 'anging around lookin' out for a chance, but . . ."

"How the devil did they get on to Suzanne? Do you think——" I stopped short. "My God, do you think they're fools enough to suspect her of the murder?"

"Looks that way."

"She must have been going through absolute hell. I suppose they've been crowding round slinging questions at her ever since she got there. Trying to confuse her and make her contradict herself." My fingers clenched. "The worst of it is she's probably started inventing a lot of lies with the idea of protecting us."

"Wouldn't put it past 'er."

I stared once more at the fateful note which I was still holding in my hand. "If this is true . . ." I began.

"It's all bleedin' well gotter come out." Tubby's jaw set firmly. "Wouldn't give 'im away not to save me own skin, but when it's a matter o' shovin' it on to your young laidy——"

"There's only one thing to be done," I interrupted. "We must go to a friend of mine in Bedford Row and make a clean breast of the whole business. He's a very clever lawyer, and it's just possible he may be able to help us."

"'E'll need to be clever." Tubby shook his head. "If 'e can get us outer this mess 'e'll be a perishin' world beater."

As the traffic signal changed and we jerked forward across Southampton Row, I suddenly straightened up and broke the prolonged silence.

"Look here, Tubby," I said, "it's damned good of you to come along, but all the same I feel pretty rotten about it. Just because you were sporting enough to give me a hand . . ."

"Naow don't start none o' that, Professor." My companion detached a stub of cigarette from his lower lip and tossed it into the road. "You ain't draggin' me into nothin'—not likely. Don't say I ain't sorry for young Davy, but if 'e's balmy enough to go shovin' skewers into blokes and then ownin' up to it, well, wot's 'e askin' for but a kick in the neck? Not as that's a dead cert, neither, seein' 'ow sick 'e is. Never can tell with doctors; might reckon 'e was off 'is rocker and bung 'im into Broadmoor."

"I wasn't referring to Davy," I replied. "I was talking about you. I've a sort of impression that you've been in trouble before, and if that's the case . . ."

"It won't be 'alf so tough on me as it will on you and the young laidy." Tubby gave a fleeting grin. "I'll know the ropes, see, and when you're inside that's 'alf the battle."

By now we had already turned into Bedford Row, and before I had time to say anything more we were slowing down in front of the office. A glance at my watch showed me that it was close on half-past twelve, and with the unspoken prayer that we should find Mr. Chetwynd on the premises I settled up with the driver and led the way in.

As we crossed the threshold and entered the passage I saw someone I recognized coming down the staircase. It was Ferris, the alert-looking clerk, whose talents as a diplomatist were being exercised on my behalf.

"Good morning, Mr. Reid." He pulled up cheerfully, and made an inviting gesture towards the open door on our right. "If you don't mind stepping inside and waiting for a moment, I'll run up and tell the Boss you're here. He was hoping that you would look in to-day."

"Thanks," I replied. "You can say that the matter is rather an urgent one, and that I'd like to see him as soon as possible."

He nodded briskly, and at the same moment I heard a quick tread of footsteps on the landing above. Almost simultaneously Chetwynd himself appeared at the head of the staircase.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I thought I recognized your voice." His eyes travelled past me in the direction of Tubby. "Come along up," he added, "and bring your friend with you."

"Hope we aren't being a nuisance," I returned. "Not keeping you from your lunch or anything of that sort."

"On the contrary I am delighted to see you." He smiled genially, and moved aside to make way for us. "I was beginning to feel a little doubtful as to whether you had received my letter."

It was with mingled feelings of relief and apprehension that I took my seat in the venerable arm-chair alongside the fireplace. During most of our journey in the taxi I had been desperately rehearsing my story, but now that the moment for confession had actually arrived, the task in front of me appeared to be more formidable than ever. Still, it had to be faced, and the only sensible course was to get it over as quickly as possible.

"It's no use beating about the bush," I said bluntly. "I'm what you might call in the soup. I'm in it right up to the neck, and what I want to know is whether there's any conceivable chance of your being able to help me out of it."

Mr. Chetwynd, who had established himself in his usual chair at the table, leaned back and raised his eyebrows.

"This is a trifle sudden," he responded drily, "but I can't say that I'm altogether surprised. I had an uncomfortable presentiment that you were getting yourself into trouble."

"You even went so far as to give me some good advice." I smiled ruefully. "Well, I didn't see my way to take it, and that's why I'm here now. If you feel like saying that it's my own damned fault . . ."

"My dear boy—if I were in the habit of dispensing such obvious truisms to my clients I should soon be out of business. What I would venture to suggest is that you should be a shade more explicit." He shot an inquiring glance at Tubby. "I take it that the presence of our unknown friend here has some bearing upon the matter in hand? By the way, wouldn't it be advisable to introduce us?"

"This is Tubby Green," I said. "He's a professional tipster, and one of my best pals."

Tubby moistened his lips. "Pleased to meet you."

"The pleasure is mutual." Mr. Chetwynd turned back to me. "Go ahead then," he continued encouragingly. "Let me hear what you have been up to, and however reprehensive it is, for goodness' sake tell me the truth. Otherwise you will be merely wasting your own time as well as mine."

"No one could appreciate that fact better than I do." Without waiting to be invited I leaned forward and helped myself to a cigarette. "The truth is the only hope there is now," I added grimly. "And you can bet your life that I'm not taking any chances."

Starting with my going ashore at Bordeaux and describing my first dramatic meeting with Suzanne, I proceeded to give him a full, faithful and unvarnished account of everything that I had so far kept from his knowledge. Apart from throwing in an occasional question, he made no attempt to interrupt my narrative. He sat there grave and motionless, his eyes fixed steadily on my face, and all the time I talked the depressing conviction that I was failing to arouse any sympathetic response kept forcing itself upon me with an ever-increasing intensity.

Even when I had finished and presented him with both Davy's note and the copy of the *Star*, it was some while before he made his first comment. He read them through with a maddening deliberation that I found almost unbearable, and then laying them down side by side on the table in front of him, pulled out a handkerchief and carefully polished his spectacles. It was as much as I could do not to jump up and shake him.

"Well," he observed at last, "whatever else you have done you have certainly opened my eyes. I have been a solicitor for nearly forty years, and I was under the impression that there was no form of human idiocy which could any longer surprise me. It would appear that I was too optimistic."

"Yes, I deserved that one; in fact I deserve everything that's coming to me." I tried to speak as calmly as possible. "Can't you understand how I feel, though? If that paragraph in the paper is right the police are trying their best to pin the murder on to Suzanne. They've got her up there at Albany Street——"

"There is no need to explain the situation; you have already made it admirably clear."

"But what do you advise me to do? How am I to put a stop to it? Should I go along there with Tubby and ask to see the Inspector?"

"That would be one way, obviously, but I am not inclined to recommend it." He paused. "It seems to me a case in which a direct approach to headquarters would be likely to prove the more efficient method."

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"With your approval I propose to ring up my friend, Colonel Warren, who is one of the Assistant Commissioners. I shall inform him that I have evidence in my possession which establishes the true facts with regard to the murder, and ask for an immediate appointment. Whether he will agree to this is doubtful. The procedure is grossly irregular, but in view of our personal relations he may be willing to dispense with a certain amount of red tape. If he is, I shall take you both with me to the Yard, and you will have the opportunity of repeating your statement. I assume that your—what shall we call him—your colleague, Mr. Green, will have no objection to accompanying us?"

"That's O.K. by me," Tubby nodded.

"It's a colossal notion," I exclaimed gratefully.

Pulling the telephone towards him, Mr. Chetwynd took off the receiver and dialled a number.

"This is Mr. Chetwynd, of 73a Bedford Row. I wish to

“speak to Colonel Warren if he is there.” There was a longish pause. “Hullo, that you, Warren? . . . well, I want to make a rather unusual request. I have two clients in the office who are in a position to throw considerable light on the murder of this bookmaker Grantley. I understand that the case is in the hands of your Albany Street people, but the circumstances are so exceptional that if you can possibly arrange it I feel justified in asking for a personal interview. I need hardly add that I am only taking such a step after mature consideration.” He sat silent for a moment while the telephone buzzed and crackled. “Yes, so I assume . . . undoubtedly, otherwise you could rest assured that I would never have made the suggestion. . . . That’s very complimentary, and I feel properly flattered. . . . By all means if it would be more convenient. . . . Yes, I think I can promise you that without fail. . . . Two o’clock then—that will be excellent, and I am very much obliged.”

The receiver clattered back into place, and unable to control my impatience, I started up from my chair.

“He’ll see us?” I demanded.

Mr. Chetwynd nodded. “We are to be at the Yard by two. The Inspector from Albany Street will be there, and you will have to make your statement to him. Warren will be present, however, and the interview will take place in his own private room.”

“Cripes!” ejaculated Tubby. “We ain’t ‘arf goin’ up in the world!”

“That gives us nearly an hour to wait.” Mr. Chetwynd was glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. “I think the most sensible way of employing it would be by going across to the Holborn and ordering a really good lunch. I should imagine that you have a rather exhausting afternoon in front of you.”

I stooped down to pick up my hat.

“You’re telling us,” I murmured bleakly.

## CHAPTER X

"Just do it comfortably," announced Mr. Chetwynd, as we swung into the Strand.

I stared out moodily at the passing traffic. "I wonder if Suzanne will be there," I muttered.

"I should think it was very unlikely." There was a mischievous twinkle behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. "I don't mind admitting that I am extremely anxious to make her acquaintance. She must be an attractive young woman to have lured you into such an orgy of criminal folly."

"I didn't need any luring," I retorted. "When it's a question of assisting justice my better instincts come to the surface automatically."

"I am only suggesting that a pretty face would probably stimulate the process."

Tubby, who was sitting opposite us, grinned broadly.

"Wait till you've seen 'er, Mister. She's a ruddy peach, she is. Don't wonder the Professor——"

"What I want to know," I broke in, "is whether you think that we shall be arrested. Even if this chap Davy owns up to the murder it won't alter the fact that we knocked Grantley out and pinched these papers. I suppose they can run us in for that if they feel inclined to?"

"Most decidedly. The plea that you were 'assisting justice' may carry some weight, but strictly according to Law you have undoubtedly laid yourself open to a criminal prosecution. It will depend entirely upon what view the authorities choose to take."

"What sort of sentence could they give us?" I asked.

"I should say anything up to six months."

"A mere trifle," I observed bitterly.

"The one essential factor is that you should all three be absolutely truthful and straightforward. I cannot impress that on you too clearly. If you attempt to keep anything back——"

"But that's exactly what Suzanne will have done. She'll have tried to convince them that she was acting entirely



on her own. Her one idea will be to save us from getting into trouble."

"I should put no depths of idiocy beyond any of you." Mr. Chetwynd shrugged. "However, it's no use worrying over hypothetical developments. We must hope for the best, and leave the issue in the hands of Providence."

We branched off down Savoy Hill, and pursuing our way along the Embankment, pulled up outside Scotland Yard. There was a stalwart-looking constable on duty at the gates, and dismissing the taxi, Mr. Chetwynd stepped forward with an authoritative air.

"We have an appointment with Colonel Warren," he announced.

"First block on the left, sir." The man was evidently impressed. "You will find someone there who will direct you to his office."

Tubby gave me a furtive wink, and passing through the entrance we headed towards an arched doorway a few yards distant. On reaching our goal we were confronted by a stalwart young man in plain clothes who, to judge by his manner, was evidently expecting our arrival.

"You are Mr. Chetwynd, I take it, sir?" He shot an appraising glance at Tubby and me. "Yes, Colonel Warren is here, and will see you immediately. I must ask these two gentlemen to wait in here."

He opened a door on his right, revealing a small, cheerless room sparsely furnished with a table and two or three wooden chairs. Followed by Tubby I stepped in obediently.

"Now, sir, if you will come with me——" The door closed cutting off the remainder of the sentence, and pausing for a moment to take a brief survey of our new surroundings, I strolled across and perched myself on the end of the table. I was conscious of a faint odour of disinfectant.

"Well, we've got here, anyway," I observed. "Smells rather like a hospital, doesn't it?"

Tubby sniffed. "That'll be to kill the bugs. Always get bugs when you get coppers." He looked about him disparagingly. "No carpet, and not even a paiper to read—shabby I calls it."

"Never mind—we shan't be here very long." I took out my cigarette case, and then, remembering where I was, reluctantly put it back. "I suppose they want to hear what Chetwynd has to say about us."

"That's the notion. Didn't happen to let on that I'd been in trouble before?"

I shook my head. "Of course not. I wasn't even sure of the fact until you told me yourself."

"Oh well, it don't make no difference." He shrugged resignedly. "Reckon they'll spot me quick enough. Got me dabs 'ere, blast their eyes."

"Don't worry," I said consolingly. "Whatever happens you're not coming out a loser. I haven't told anyone yet, but as a matter of fact I've just had an amazing stroke of luck. While I was in Spain an old cousin of mine pegged out, and when I got back I found that he'd left me most of his money. It's quite a tidy packet."

"Corlucus, you don't say!" Tubby was staring at me open-mouthed.

"Soon as we're out of this mess," I continued, "I shall have to look around for one or two good investments. What do you say to taking me into the tipping business as a sleeping partner? If I were to fix you up with a new car and a really smart outfit I've a sort of idea that we should do pretty well. What do you think yourself?"

"Do pretty well!" Tubby wiped his forehead. "Why, with a slap up show like that—coo what a gift! Maiké enough in two or three seasons to buy a blinkin' pub."

"And why not? We could call it The Green Man, and have a picture of you for a signboard."

"Strewth, Professor, you ain't 'arf got a brain! Seems like something you dream about, don't it? Fancy me with a boozier of me own and a saucy little piece in the bar ladlin' out the wallop!" He drew in a long breath and sighed luxuriously.

"It's a beautiful thought," I agreed. "You can sit and meditate on it for a bit. Help to pass the time while they're talking to Chetwynd."

For several minutes neither of us made any further attempt

at conversation, and then just as I had slid down restlessly and was strolling across to examine a framed notice on the wall, the handle of the door turned quickly and the broad-shouldered young man who had imprisoned us reappeared on the threshold. His face was completely impassive.

"You're wanted now," he remarked curtly. "Better leave your hats here."

In a silent procession we ascended a flight of stone stairs which brought us to a wide, distempered corridor, with numerous rooms branching away in either direction. Moving across to the one opposite our conductor tapped briskly. There was a muffled response from inside, and opening the door he motioned us forward.

We found ourselves in a large, lofty apartment, with tall windows looking out over the Embankment. Apart from Mr. Chetwynd and a lean, sun-burned, middle-aged man who were seated at a table in the centre, the company consisted of three other individuals, all of whom were obviously police officials. One of them wore the uniform of a sergeant; the other two were in mufti.

"I take it that you have no objection to my being present?" Mr. Chetwynd glanced inquiringly at his companion.

"None at all." The Assistant Commissioner surveyed us with a cold, unblinking stare. "You can sit there," he added, indicating a couple of chairs at the foot of the table, and at the same instant the sergeant, who had produced a note-book and a pencil from his tunic, retired discreetly towards a small desk in the background. As he did so the other two moved in a step closer.

There was a brief pause while we took our places, and then looking up from some papers in front of him, Colonel Warren addressed himself to me.

"You, I assume, are Mr. Alan Reid?"

I nodded silently.

"I understand that you have come here to make a voluntary statement with regard to the death of a man named Vincent Grantley."

"That is so," I admitted,

"As the circumstances appear to be highly exceptional, I have consented to your solicitor's request for a personal interview." He made a gesture towards the nearer of his two subordinates, a tall, clean-shaven man in the middle thirties, with a pleasant expression and extremely shrewd eyes. "This is Detective Inspector Ward. He is in charge of the case, and he is prepared to listen to whatever you wish to say."

Pulling round the chair beside him the Inspector sat down facing us. He gave the impression of being in no particular hurry.

"Well, Mr. Reid," he began almost casually, "it appears that you and that man Green, who I think is an old acquaintance of ours, are in a position to be of considerable assistance to us. According to your solicitor you were not only present last night on the scene of the crime, but you profess to have definite information as to who was responsible for killing Grantley."

"What Mr. Chetwynd has told you," I replied, "is perfectly true."

"I also understand that you and a young woman named Miss Suzanne Despard were concerned in opening a safe belonging to the deceased and removing certain of its contents. Are you prepared to admit that as well?"

"Quite prepared," I replied.

"Then perhaps it would be best if you were to tell us about it in your own words. It is my duty to warn you that your statement will be taken down in writing, and that after you have read it through and signed it, it may be used in evidence."

"I've not the slightest objection," I said. "The trouble is that if I'm to make everything quite clear it's going to be a pretty long story."

"Never mind that," interposed the Colonel. "Listening to long stories is one of the penalties of our profession."

"If you wish for my advice," remarked Mr. Chetwynd, "you will give a frank and complete account of your entire connection with the affair. In my opinion it will be by far the most satisfactory course."

"Very well," I observed. "In that case I had better start with my going to Spain. If I had stayed comfortably at home none of this would have happened."

With four pairs of eyes fixed steadily upon mine, I proceeded to relate the whole circumstances which had led up to my joining the Basque forces, explaining at the same time, my very cogent reasons for wishing to keep this regrettable breach of contract from the knowledge of the University authorities. This done, I ploughed resolutely through the rest of my story, very much as I had told it at Bedford Row. From my being picked up by the *Emily Hart* right down to Tubby's arrival at my rooms that morning. I omitted no fact which appeared to have the slightest bearing upon the grim events of the previous night. My sole aim was to be as truthful and accurate as possible, and considering the amount I had to get off my chest I think I can claim to have made a fairly successful job of it.

For the most part I was allowed to talk without interruption. Once or twice the Inspector threw in a curt question, and about half way through my narrative I noticed a brief whispered colloquy in progress between Colonel Warren and the second plain clothes officer. After it was finished the latter slipped quietly from the room, reappearing, however, in a few minutes and handing over what looked like a sheet of typewritten notes. This was, in turn, passed on to the Inspector, who glanced through it with an expressionless face.

I think the worst part of the whole ordeal was the long pause that followed upon the end of my confession. In my acute anxiety about Suzanne the strained silence seemed almost unbearable. It was like sitting in a Harley Street consulting-room waiting for some grim-visaged specialist to pronounce his verdict.

"A very interesting and remarkable story." The observation came from the Assistant Commissioner. "Since we are in possession of a report from the Captain of the *Emily Hart* which confirms the first half of your statement I think we may accept that more or less as it stands. With regard to the remainder, well, as Inspector Ward is in charge of

the case——” He motioned to his subordinate as though encouraging him to take the lead.

“What about you, Green?” The Inspector turned abruptly on Tubby. “Is that all correct as far as you’re concerned? Anything you wish to add or contradict?”

“Nothin’.” Tubby shook his head. “The Professor’s given you the straight griffin.”

“You’re satisfied that the note left at your lodgings is in the handwriting of this lad, Davy Evans?”

“Course it is. Why, didn’t ’e get jugged for tryin’ to out the swine last year? You know that as well as I do.”

“Where does he live?”

“Over an empty garidge up be’ind King’s Cross. Can’t tell you the name o’ the plice, but I could take you there right enough.”

“Oh you could, eh?” The Inspector shifted his chair and glanced round in the Direction of Colonel Warren.

“Looks to me we’re on the right track, sir. Anyhow, I think Evans ought to be pulled in straight away. If this note of his is genuine the less time we waste the better.”

The other nodded.

“I take it that you have obtained a statement from the Despard girl? How do the two stories hang together?”

“Not too well, sir. She certainly gave us the same stuff about her grandfather being murdered in France, but according to her she was working this burglary racket entirely on her own. Says she shoved a sleeping powder into Grantley’s drink, and when he went off she got hold of his keys and opened the safe. Swears that she took the passport and the bank receipt, and sticks to it that there was no one else in the house.”

“Any sign of the fellow having been drugged?”

“None at all, sir. Doctor reports that he was knocked out by a punch on the chin, and then stabbed to the heart afterwards. He puts the actual time of death between twelve and one this morning.”

“You needn’t worry about Miss Despard,” I broke in.

“She has invented all that just to save us from being arrested.”

She wouldn't give us away if you went on questioning her till you were blue in the face. That's the sort of girl she is."

"She certainly appears to be an enterprising young woman," remarked the Colonel drily. "It is unfortunate that she should have so little respect for the laws of the country she happens to be living in."

"You must blame me for that," I urged. "I ought to have persuaded her to come to you in the first place. The whole thing was a mad idea really but——"

"But it struck you as being rather romantic and exciting, and so you proceeded to make an unmitigated idiot of yourself?" Surveying me for a moment with a frosty stare, the Colonel shifted his glance to the Inspector. "Get on with it, then," he continued. "Pick up this boy Evans, and see what he has to say for himself. Our two visitors here had better go along with you and show you the way. Take all three of them to Albany Street, and keep them until we have had time to make further inquiries. If you think Evans is too ill to be moved get a statement out of him and ring up for a doctor."

"Very good, sir." The Inspector rose and saluted.

"Do you mind staying for a moment, Chetwynd! There are one or two matters I should like to discuss with you."

Mr. Chetwynd bowed. "I am entirely at your disposal," he replied affably.

As we slid past the Russell Hotel the Inspector closed his note-book and replaced it in his pocket. Then tilting back his hat and leaning forward he touched Tubby lightly on the shoulder.

"What is this place where Evans lives?" he demanded. "Just a room above a garage?"

"That's right." Tubby glanced round from the seat in front. "Leastways there's three of 'em really—kitchen and two bedrooms, sec?"

"Chauffeur's flat, I suppose?"

"Was at one time. Been empty a goodish while naow, and the bloke as owns it, 'e's a sorter relation o' Davy's mother.

Sorry for 'er I reckon. Lets 'em live there cheap so long as no one don't come along and want to taik it."

"Oh, so he's got his mother with him, has he? Ever seen her?"

"Yus, I bin up there. Very decent party, but that blind she can't 'ardly get around. Thinks the world o' Davy, she do. Near broke 'er 'eart when you shoved 'im inside, and this 'ere business'll jist about finish 'er off." He made a wry face. "'Strewth, I'd give a tenner to be out of it."

"Yes, it's not altogether a pleasant job, especially if he's as ill as he makes out he is. Do you think that's genuine?"

"Betcher life. Spitting blood the last two days. An' that weak you could 'ave shoved 'im over with one finger."

"Seems to have been strong enough to stick a knife into Grantley."

"That don't take much doin', not when a bloke's lyin' there askin' for it."

"Well, we shall find out before long." The Inspector turned his head and glanced through the window. "Keep your eyes open and tell Higgins which way to go."

Under Tubby's directions the car swung round to the right, and, turning up Ossulston Street, branched off into a dreary region of goods yards and coal dumps, intersected by short, squalid-looking side streets, the inhabitants of which appeared to consist principally of shrill-voiced and exceedingly grubby-faced children. As we passed I noticed several of them pointing excitedly at our uniformed driver and at the stalwart figure of the sergeant sitting stolidly beside him. Then swerving through a narrow opening between two smoke-grimed buildings we suddenly emerged into a square, cobble-paved space, shut in on either side by a twelve foot brick wall. Facing us at the opposite end was a garage, above which could be observed a couple of small windows.

The car came to a halt, and jumping down briskly the sergeant jerked open the door. In another minute all three of us had alighted, and the driver was peering round inquiringly as though waiting for further instructions.

"Take her on a bit and then turn her round," commanded the Inspector. He glanced doubtfully at Tubby and me.



"You two had better come along with us, I think. May as well be sure we've got hold of the right man."

To the left of the garage stood an open doorway with a wooden staircase leading up to the rooms above. We advanced towards it, and as we pulled up in a body outside I saw Tubby surreptitiously moisten his lips. I must admit that I was not feeling too comfortable myself.

Mounting in single file, with the Inspector leading the way, we came to a second door at the head of the flight. It was equipped with a rusty iron knocker, and in response to two or three vigorous raps I could hear the sound of shuffling footsteps approaching from within. There was a brief pause, and then the silence was broken by a weak and obviously frightened voice.

"Who's there?" it inquired.

"We are the police. Hurry up now and don't keep us waiting."

Very slowly a bolt was drawn back, and looking round the sergeant's shoulder, I caught sight of a strange, pathetic figure. It was that of a poorly-dressed woman; a frail, middle-aged creature with a terrified expression on her drawn features. She stood there peering and blinking at us through the half-open gap.

"Are you Mrs. Evans?"

"Yes," she faltered. "I'm Mrs. Evans. What do you want?"

"I want to have a word or two with your son, David."

"You can't. He's much too ill."

She made a feeble effort to close the door, but the Inspector's foot was already in the way. Taking her by the arm he put her gently on one side, and then, followed by the sergeant, stepped forward into the room beyond. Tubby and I remained in the doorway, our eyes riveted on the macabre tableau that had suddenly presented itself.

Propped up with cushions on a low couch against the opposite wall lay a gaunt, motionless figure, half covered by a rough blanket. The white, unshaven face glistening with perspiration and crowned by a tangle of matted hair could almost have been mistaken for that of a corpse. The room was filled with the sound of harsh, laboured breathing, and one

bare, thin arm trailed listlessly over the side, as though it had slipped down through sheer weakness.

"I'm a police officer, and it is my duty to ask you certain questions." The Inspector had pulled up a rickety chair and seated himself beside the couch. "I must warn you that your replies will be taken down in writing and that they may be used in evidence."

"Don't tell them nothing, Davy." Mrs. Evans pushed her way past the sergeant, who was already producing his notebook. "You just lie quiet and——"

"All right, Mother. They can't do no harm to me. They've come too late." With a painful movement the white face turned slowly in our direction. "So you've split on me, eh? That ain't like you, Tubby."

"I'm sorry, chum." Tubby's voice was little more than a hoarse whisper. "They was tryin' to pin it on to the Professor's young laidy, see? You wouldn't 'ave wanted 'em to do that, would you?"

"Do you admit that you wrote Green a note in which you stated that you had 'got your own back' on someone, and that he would be seeing about it in the papers?"

"Yes, I wrote it." There was a faint touch of defiance in the low husky answer.

"Was the person you referred to a man named Vincent Grantley?"

"Don't answer!" Mrs. Evans wrung her hands piteously. "They want to trap you, Davy, and you're too ill to know what you're saying."

"It's no use, Mother. It's got to come out, and if it wasn't for you I wouldn't care." Two dull spots of colour crept into the sunken cheeks, and dragging himself up a little higher the speaker drew in a long, gasping breath. "Yes, I'm the man you want," he panted. "I killed Grantley right enough. If you look in the next room you'll find some of his filthy blood on my coat."

With a stifled cry Mrs. Evans buried her face in her arms. "Davy, Davy!" she sobbed.

"I'd meant to do it ever since the day Effie drowned herself. I bungled it the first time, and after you let me outer

clink I had to lie low for a bit in case some o' your chaps were watching me. Then when that lousy bleedin' started again I knew it was all up. If I didn't get him at once I'd peg out before I had the chance."

"Are you quite certain that Grantley was still alive when you stabbed him?"

"Alive!" A strange, rather ghastly grin flickered across the twisted lips. "Oh yes, he was alive right enough. Layin' on the floor three parts drunk. Squealed like a rabbit when he saw me and my knife."

"Even so you had no compunction about killing him?"

"No more'n if he'd been a blasted——" A violent spasm of coughing drowned the last word, and clutching at his chest with both hands Davy slumped back against the cushion. At the same moment a gush of blood came streaming from his mouth, trickling down his chin and spreading sluggishly over the side of the couch. The sight was so horrible that I drew back with an involuntary shudder.

"My boy, my boy—oh, my poor boy!" Mrs. Evans had fallen on her knees and was clasping the limp form to her breast in a fruitless despairing embrace. Thrusting back his chair, the Inspector rose to his feet.

"You've murdered him," wailed the thin voice; "you and that devil between you. You drove him to it, and now perhaps you're satisfied."

"Don't talk like that, ma'am; it can't do any good." With a sort of clumsy tenderness the big man placed his hand on the quivering shoulder. "I'm sorry for you, indeed I am. I can understand how you feel, and whatever that lad o' yours may have done I don't think that he was properly to blame. If ever a man deserved what he got it was that murdering crook Grantley."

There was something in his voice which seemed to produce an immediate effect. The agonised sobbing gave place to a low, whimpering moan, and releasing her hold Mrs. Evans allowed him to lift the pitiful figure out of her arms and lay it back gently on the bloodstained blanket. Even from my position in the doorway I could see that life was already extinct.

"It's best for him it should have happened like this; that's the way to look at it, ma'am. He's out of all his troubles now, and if there's such a thing as justice in the next world I reckon he'll have precious little to be afraid of." Straightening up slowly the Inspector glanced at his subordinates. "You'll have to stay here, Jackson. As soon as we get to the station I'll send Doctor Romer along with a nurse, and they'll see to everything that's necessary. In the meanwhile, ma'am," he stooped down again over the bowed head, "if I could persuade you to go into your bedroom and rest for a little——"

"No, no, I want to be with him. Leave me alone, please leave me alone."

"No one will interfere with you. You can do exactly as you wish."

Clearing his throat gruffly, Inspector Ward drew the sergeant on one side and stood there for a moment giving him some whispered instructions. As soon as these were completed he squared his shoulders and stepping out between us closed the door after him.

"Well, I'm not sorry that's over," he observed, dabbing his forehead. "Never had a rottener job to do not since I joined the Force."

"I can well believe it," I muttered.

Tubby pulled out a crumpled packet of Gold Flake, and lit one with a shaking hand. "'Strewth!" he remarked, staring at our companion. "If anyone 'ad told me that a copper could be so 'uman I'd 'ave thought 'e was a ruddy liar."

## CHAPTER XI

I SUPPRESSED an incipient yawn, and for about the tenth time looked gloomily at my watch.

"Wot's it naow?" inquired Tubby.

"Close on half-past five. We've been here over a couple of hours."

"Seems longer, don't it?" He glanced slowly round the white-washed walls and then raised his eyes to the little

iron-barred window above our heads. "They're just openin', come to think of it," he added. "Don't know how you feel, but my throat's like a bloomin' sand pit."

"There's a bottle of water over on the table." I nodded towards the far corner.

"Water!" he repeated disgustedly. "Blimey, I ain't as thirsty as all that."

"Well, I suppose somebody will turn up eventually." I settled back again in my hard, uncomfortable chair. "I wish I could get that woman's face out of my mind," I muttered. "I keep on seeing it every time I shut my eyes."

"Davy's ma, you mean. Yus, you're right there. Fair gave me the creeps the way she took on." Tubby shook his head. "Thought the world o' that youngster she did, an' there's no gettin' away from it that 'e looked after 'er good an' proper. Don't know 'ow she'll manage naow 'e's gone. Too blind to go out to work, and no money 'cept the little bit wot 'e used to take off of me."

"You needn't worry," I assured him. "I'll see that she's quite comfortable for the rest of her life. Damn it all, if anyone ever deserved a pension it's the mother of the fellow who killed Grantley."

"Lumme. I'd forgotten you was a bloated capitalist."

"I'd forgotten it myself up to a moment ago. Can't think of anything till I've seen Suzanne, and found out how she is, and what they did to her this morning. Put her through a hell of a gruelling I imagine——"

The click of a key reached my ears, and before I had time to swing round the door was already opening. On the threshold stood the trimly-knit figure of Inspector Ward.

"Beginning to think we'd overlooked you." He stepped inside, and closing the door behind him strolled leisurely forward.

"Not really." I got up from my chair. "We felt sure that something would happen sooner or later. I have always been told that the memory of the police is practically infallible."

"Sounds as though we were a herd of elephants." He smiled pleasantly, and held out an envelope which he was

carrying in his left hand. "Here's a letter for you from your solicitor. You had better have a look at it and see what he says."

I grabbed it eagerly, and slitting open the flap, with a word of thanks, pulled out the type-written sheet inside. It bore the Bedford Row heading, and had apparently been dispatched by special messenger.

"4.30 p.m.

"MY DEAR ALAN,

"I have just been enjoying a talk over the phone with our mutual friend, Colonel Warren. He has been kind enough to inform me of the latest developments, and I am sure it will relieve your mind to learn that in the opinion of the authorities the fact that Grantley met his death at the hands of that unfortunate lad, David Evans, is now fully established. In the circumstances, although the activities of you and Miss Despard and your engaging protégé Mr. 'Tubby' Green may still be the subject of further proceedings, instructions are being sent to the Superintendent at Albany Street that you need no longer be detained in custody. I understand that you will be released shortly after the receipt of this letter, and in my opinion it is highly desirable that we should get together and discuss the situation as soon as possible. Unfortunately, I have an urgent appointment which will necessitate my leaving the office at five o'clock, and will probably keep me occupied for at least an hour. This being so, I think the best thing you can do on regaining your freedom will be to give Miss Despard a cup of tea (which I am sure she must be badly in need of) and then bring her along to Chester Square. I hope you will both be able to stay to dinner. I have warned Elizabeth of your probable arrival, and I need hardly add that her curiosity with regard to you and the young lady in question verges upon the indecent. The insatiable interest which women appear to take in other people's love affairs is a psychological problem to which, as yet, I have never been able to find a wholly satisfactory solution.

"I have no time to waste now in enlarging upon your outrageous behaviour, but it will afford me considerable pleasure to give you my full and frank opinion over what I can only describe as a totally undeserved glass of port. If that doesn't make you thoroughly ashamed of yourself nothing will.

"Yours reproachfully, and without much hope,  
"ROBERT CHETWYND."

Hardly able to credit the truth of such good news I looked up to meet the watchful eyes of the Inspector.

"Is—is this a fact?" I stammered. "Are we really free to clear out?"

"Those are my instructions."

"Wot—me too?" exclaimed Tubby.

"Unless you're feeling homesick, and would like to stay with us for a bit."

"How about Miss Despard?" I demanded.

Our visitor grinned pleasantly. "Well, seeing that she's been waiting for you at least ten minutes I should say that she's probably getting a bit impatient."

With frantic haste I strode across to the table and grabbed hold of my hat.

"Let's go," I said eagerly. "For heaven's sake let's go before I wake up."

Still smiling, the Inspector led the way out into a stone-flagged passage, and halting us by a gesture of his hand, moved forward a few paces and opened a door on the left.

"All ready now, Miss," he observed. "Just been collecting a couple of friends of yours."

He stepped aside, and as he did so Suzanne made her appearance. The next moment she came towards me with outstretched hands, and blissfully regardless of my surroundings I took her in my arms and gave her a prolonged and exulting hug.

"Alan!" she whispered, pressing her cheek against mine. "Oh, I am so happy to see you again."

"My poor darling," I murmured, "you must have had a perfectly foul time." I kissed the tip of her nose. "Never

mind, though," I added. "It's all over now, and I'm going to take you out and give you some tea."

"But what has happened? They have told me nothing. All they have said is that I may go home."

"I'll explain everything as soon as we're in the taxi." I released her gently and looked round in search of Tubby who had discreetly fallen back. "Would you go ahead and see if you can get hold of one?" I asked. "That's to say if our friend here has no objection."

"Not the slightest." Inspector Ward jerked his head towards the end of the corridor. "That's the way out. You'll find a stand about twenty yards up the street."

Sliding past us like an eel, Tubby vanished from sight, and turning back again the Inspector addressed himself to Suzanne.

"I hope you're not very tired, Miss? It was my business to question you, and I expect you thought I was a bit harsh and severe about it. The fact is, I felt sure you were keeping a lot back, and trying to shield someone, and that being the case I had no alternative except to go on until I could get at the truth."

Suzanne looked up at him gravely.

"It is very nice of you to speak so kindly. You had to do your duty, of course, and it would be stupid of me to feel any ill will." She gave a quaint little smile. "I was very frightened of you, though. At one time I thought you were going to beat me."

"Well, quite between ourselves, Miss, I don't mind admitting that I did feel rather like it." The grey eyes twinkled. "You kept up your end grandly, though, and if you'll allow me to I'd like to congratulate you and wish you the best of luck."

"But that is charming of you."

"I think we ought to do something in return," I answered. "How about inviting him to our wedding?"

"Why, of course, you will come, won't you? It would give me so much pleasure."

The Inspector beamed at her. "You bet I will," he replied heartily.



Without further delay he escorted us to the front entrance of the station, outside which a taxi was already drawn up in the roadway. Tubby was standing beside it, and as we stepped out on to the pavement he moved forward and jerked open the door.

"Where to, Professor?" he inquired.

I glanced at the driver, who was eyeing us with considerable interest. "Is there a really good tea shop anywhere in this part of the world?" I asked.

"There's The White Carnation—that ain't very far. Posh little place judgin' by the looks of it."

"We'll give it a trial," I nodded. "Hop in, Tubby: you're coming with us."

"Not me," was the answer. "I'm poppin' orf round the corner for a pint o' wallop. If I don't get one inside of me precious quick I'll be 'avin' wot they calls a nervous breakdown."

I laughed. "We mustn't risk that, or it might interfere with our business arrangements. You'll blow along to-morrow morning, though, anyway, won't you? Things ought to have straightened out a bit by then, and we can fix it all up over another bottle of fiz." I helped Suzanne into the taxi and clambered in after her. "I've just had a sudden inspiration," I added, thrusting my head out of the window. "When we get that pub we'll engage the Inspector as chucker-out."

With a swift jerk the taxi lurched forward, and leaving Tubby gazing after us with what appeared to be awe-struck admiration I sank back and put my arm round Suzanne.

"Thank heaven we're out of that," I observed. "I'm desperately sorry to have left you there so long but——"

"Tell me what has happened." She slipped her hand into mine, gripping my fingers tightly. "What does it all mean, and why have they let us go?"

"They know who killed Grantley," I said gently. "It was that young fellow, Davy Evans, whose girl committed suicide—the chap who tried to stab him last year and got sent to prison."

"Oh!" She drew in a long, quivering breath. "But—but how did he do it, and how did they find out?"

"He wrote Tubby a note practically admitting it. He must have turned up there just after we cleared out, and walked in by the back door which we left open. Then Grantley's man came home and found the dead body lying in the hall. The whole story was in an early edition of the *Star*, and Tubby got hold of a copy and came posting down to me. They didn't actually mention your name, but they said that a young lady who was a professional singer had been taken to Albany Street to be questioned, and when I read that I realized that there was only one thing for it. I went straight to Chetwynd, my solicitor, and told him everything. He happens to be a friend of Colonel Warren, one of the Assistant Commissioners, so he took us down to Scotland Yard, where we handed them over the note and made a clean breast of it. Knowing you, I felt that you'd be lying like a trooper to try to shield us. I was in a horrible funk that they might even end up by arresting you for the murder."

She sat frowning thoughtfully for a moment as though absorbing the information that I had just given her.

"I wonder how they found out that I went back to the house. Do you think Grantley told his servant?"

"I haven't an idea, but I expect Chetwynd will know. He has invited us to go along to his place and stay for dinner. I'll show you his letter as soon as—— Hallo, here we are, apparently!"

The taxi had slowed up in front of a smart-looking little establishment, in the window of which, amid a tempting display of cakes and other delicacies, stood a large bowl of white carnations. Our driver's opinion of it appeared to be fully justified, and after rewarding him handsomely for his good taste, I pulled open a glass-panelled door and followed hopefully in Suzanne's wake. Having had nothing inside me since breakfast I was feeling as hungry as a cormorant.

It was quite an attractive place, decorated in white and pale green, with small tables scattered about at discreet intervals. Except for a couple of rather stout ladies, both of whom were talking simultaneously, we appeared to be the only customers. Giving them as wide a berth as possible, we headed for the opposite corner, and just as we had arrived

at our destination, a tall, willowy vision, whose mouth resembled a scarlet gash, sauntered forward languidly to take our order.

"Can you let us have some tea?" I inquired. "I'm afraid we're a bit late, but we're both simply ravenous."

"That's quait e all raight. We keep open till six-thirty." She flashed us a mechanical smile. "What would you lai ke?"

"What can you let us have?" I continued.

"Home-made scones. Foie gras or cucumber sandwiches. A selection of assorted cakes."

"That's marvellous," I said. "You had better bring the whole lot, I think."

With another dazzling display of white teeth she drifted off behind a neighbouring curtain, and depositing my hat on a vacant chair I sat down beside Suzanne.

"Go on, Alan, please," she whispered. "This boy David Evans? Have they arrested him?"

I shook my head. "He is out of their reach. He died just after he had confessed everything. I was there when it happened, and so was Tubby." Speaking in a low voice, I described the tragic and unforgettable scene in the little kitchen above the garage, and all the time I was talking I could see the growing distress and indignation that gathered steadily in her dark hazel eyes. I had barely concluded my story when we were interrupted by the arrival of our tea.

"But it is terrible," she whispered, as soon as we were alone again. "That boy was no murderer. It is not wrong to kill a man like Grantley. I would have done it myself if I had thought that he would escape."

"I believe you would," I said. "Unfortunately you'd have been hanged, or else sent to prison for the rest of your life. It's utterly absurd, of course, but that's the price one has to pay for living in a civilized country."

"I'm thinking about that poor woman, his mother. She is suffering so much, and somehow I feel as though it was my fault. If we had not left the door open——"

"It would have been exactly the same. Davy would have got in somehow or other. He was determined to settle up with the brute before he passed out, and all we did was to make

things a trifle easier for him. Can't say I feel any particular regret on that account."

For a moment Suzanne made no answer. "I will go and see her," she announced suddenly. "I will tell her how much I admire her son for what he did, and how sorry I am that she has had so much trouble and misery. Perhaps she will permit me to help her."

"It's all fixed up," I explained. "I told Tubby that I would make her an allowance for the rest of her life."

"You? But that is not fair."

"Why not?"

She hesitated. "How—how can you afford it? Even if you sell these articles of yours——"

"Ah, that reminds me!" I swallowed the remains of a cucumber sandwich and summoned up my courage. "I also have a confession to make, and I'm afraid it's going to be rather a staggering one. Do you feel strong enough to face up to it now or would you like to have some more tea first?"

She wrinkled her forehead. "If it is as serious as all that I think I would prefer to get it over at once."

"Then you must prepare for a terrific shock. My name isn't Russell: it's Reid. I have been deceiving you grossly. I'm not the sort of picturesque adventurer I pretended to be: as a matter of fact I went out to Spain with a travelling scholarship from a University. My job was to write a book about the Basques, but instead of attending to it properly I managed to get mixed up in the scrapping, and that landed me in a devil of a mess. You see, I had broken the rules of my contract, and if it had come to the ears of the University authorities they'd have booted me out straightaway. When I escaped and was picked up by that boat I thought my only chance was to give them a wrong name and sneak ashore quietly as soon as we got to London. I meant to lie low a bit and then bob up again as myself, and pretend that I'd been released from internment. I didn't dare tell you the truth at first, and after that—well, when you've fallen hopelessly in love with somebody it isn't too easy to switch round suddenly and own up that you've been lying your head off. Besides, we've been so busy I never seem to have had the time."

There was a big pause and then, picking up her cup, she took a long sip.

"Is that all?" she inquired calmly.

"Not by a long chalk," I admitted.

"Go on then." The corners of her lips twitched. "So far I do not find it very 'staggering.' I always thought that you were hiding something from me."

"You did, honestly?"

"But of course. You looked so uncomfortable, just like a child who has been naughty. It made me want to laugh and kiss you!"

"This is extremely humiliating. I was under the impression that I was getting away with it." I helped myself to another sandwich. "Now we're coming to the really thrilling part. The first thing I found when I got back was a letter from my friend, Mr. Chetwynd. He informed me that an old cousin of mine had died while I was abroad and that I was mentioned in his will."

"Yes, you told me that."

"But I didn't tell you the whole story. I wanted to keep it as a pleasant surprise for our wedding morning. I meant to whisper it into your ear as we walked down the aisle."

"Oh, you are such a baby, Alan: that is what I love about you!" She laughed softly and patted my hand.

"You remember that old house I took you up to see at Hampstead? Well, that's where my cousin lived. His name was Melville Reid, and he not only left it to me but he chucked in a legacy of three thousand a year as well."

"Three thousand a year!" She stared at me incredulously.

"I hope it won't make any difference. You're not one of those high-minded people who have conscientious scruples about living upon unearned increment?"

"Me! Why, I think it is a beautiful way to live." She paused. "Oh, Alan, I can hardly believe it. Is it really true? Those policemen worried me so much I feel that perhaps I may have gone off my head."

"Don't be afraid," I said encouragingly. "You're perfectly sane, and the whole thing's an honest-to-God fact. There's just one tiny hitch at the moment. Another cousin of

mine, an unwholesome squirt called Maurice Trevor, is trying to make out that I'm dead. You see, if I had happened to peg out before the old man he'd come into the money."

"But how absurd! You must go and hit him like you did Grantley. That will teach him that you are still alive."

"Not a bad idea," I admitted, "but on the whole I think we'd better leave it to Chetwynd. After all, it's no use paying a lawyer and barking one's own knuckles." I pulled out the letter. "Read this," I continued, "and it will give you some idea of what he's like. He's what the Irish call 'a lovely fellow,' and his wife's an absolute dear, too. I'm certain they'll fall for you with a crash."

There was a brief silence, and then, raising her eyes slowly, she handed me back the note.

"They do sound rather nice, and I can tell that they are very fond of you. We shall at least have one thing in common."

"If you talk like that," I replied, "I shall grab hold of you and hug you. Then we shall both be chucked out."

"But that would never do. You are too important a person." She smiled mischievously. "Now I know who you really are I will be more careful."

The grandfather clock in the corner gave a sudden isolated boom, and looking across I saw that it was half-past six.

"I'd hate to hurry you, darling," I remarked, "especially if you're still hungry. All the same, we ought to be making a move soon. Chetwynd will be home by now and——"

"I am quite ready." She produced a small purse, and taking out a tiny scrap of mirror held it up to inspect her reflection. "Oh dear, I look terrible. When your friends see me they will think that you are mad."

"It's of no consequence," I assured her. "They've thought that ever since they've known me."

"So you've actually arrived. Well, that's something to be thankful for."

Emerging into the hall where the butler was in the act of relieving me of my hat, Mr. Chetwynd surveyed me grimly from under his tufted eyebrows. Then with a sudden twinkle he turned his attention to Suzanne. "I presume this is the

young lady who has been the inspiring factor in your criminal activities?"

Before I could answer there was a sound of quick footsteps and Mrs. Chetwynd came hurrying out from the drawing-room.

"Don't bully them, Robert. I won't allow it." Sweeping imperiously towards us, she took both my hands in hers. "My dear Alan, I can't tell you what a joy it is to see you back. Just like somebody returning from the dead. I don't know why, but I had quite made up my mind that you had been shot by those wretched Spaniards." She kissed me affectionately on either cheek. "And so this is Suzanne! Why, Alan, she's lovely—perfectly lovely."

"Not too bad," I admitted, "considering that she's been nine hours in a police station. You wait till you've seen her washed and tidied up!"

"Don't take the slightest notice of him. You look too charming for words, my dear, though I can see that you're almost fit to drop. Of course that's only what one might expect after all the horrors you've been through. Come along into the study; it's more cosy there, and you can lie down on the sofa. Get us some drinks, Hammond, and for Heaven's sake hurry up with them."

Putting an arm firmly round Suzanne's shoulders, she led the way forward, and in another moment or so I was sinking back luxuriously into a comfortable arm-chair and accepting a cigarette from Mr. Chetwynd's proffered case. Never in my life have I felt so illimitably happy and contented.

"It's very sweet of you to be so kind to me, but really and truly I am quite all right." Suzanne, who was being carefully installed upon the big leather couch in the corner, looked up with a grateful smile. "I had a splendid tea with Alan, and I feel so strong and well now there is no reason why you should spoil me like this."

"Nonsense, my dear. You lie still and rest yourself. You shall have a nice cocktail in a minute, and that will do you a world of good." Our hostess gave her a maternal pat. "Of course I am simply dying to hear all about it," she continued, turning to me. "So far I have only just had the bare outline

from Robert. It sounds like one of those wild 'thrillers' one sometimes gets from Boot's. I had no idea that such incredible things happened in real life."

"They don't often," remarked Mr. Chetwynd drily. "Thanks to our modern system of certifying lunatics the requisite material is more or less limited."

The reappearance of the butler caused a temporary diversion and it was not until we had all been provided with drinks that I felt called upon to enter the lists.

"Have a heart," I said pleadingly. "I've been through the whole story twice to-day and a third time would just about finish me off. I promise to tell you everything as soon as I feel a trifle stronger. At present my only desire is to lie back and absorb gin."

"My dear boy, you shall do exactly as you please. Give him the decanter, Robert, and let him help himself."

"There's one thing I'm rather curious about." I turned to Chetwynd. "How did the police find out that Suzanne went back to St. John's Wood with Grantley?"

"In the way they make most of their discoveries. That is to say, someone came along and told them. In this case it happened to be the taxi driver."

"The taxi driver!" I repeated. "But——"

"Oh, it was quite simple. As a matter of routine their first step was to make inquiries at all the West End ranks, and early in the morning a man came forward and told them that he had picked up our friend outside the Milan in company with a young lady whom he recognised by sight. It appeared that on several occasions he had driven her back to some flats in Notting Hill Gate, and had been agreeably impressed by her charm and beauty. Only shows the danger of being gifted with an attractive personality."

"As easy as that, was it?" I laughed.

"What Holmes used to call 'elementary,'" Mr. Chetwynd paused. "Having questioned Miss Despard, and having discovered certain documents in her possession, they felt it advisable to detain her in custody while further investigations were being made. These were well under way when you turned up at my office with your devastating bombshell."



"Did they get into touch with the French police?" I inquired.

"They did, and, what is more to the point, the French police got into touch with the doctor at Bordeaux. It seems that he confirmed Miss Despard's story with regard to the housekeeper's statement, though he was inclined to believe that the woman was delirious, and that very little importance should be attached to what she said. Still, it was confirmatory evidence, and as such it did a good deal towards clearing up the situation. This, of course, had been rather complicated by our young friend's altruistic efforts to keep you out of trouble. Her account of what had actually taken place at the house was obviously false. There was no indication of Grantley having been drugged, and in short, if Providence had not seen fit to intervene I am afraid she would have found herself in a very serious predicament." He shook his head and looked at Suzanne over the top of his spectacles. "I hope it will be a life-long lesson to you. The sanctity of truth——"

"Don't be ridiculous, Robert. She has behaved splendidly all through." Seating herself on the edge of the couch, Mrs. Chetwynd took Suzanne's hand and squeezed it approvingly. "Why, of course you had to tell a few fibs, my dear. It's what any nice girl would do for a man she was really fond of."

"As a reputable solicitor I must decline to listen to such immoral sentiments." With a brief chuckle Mr. Chetwynd turned back to me. "Incidentally I have got some news that will interest you, Alan. It concerns the question of your regrettable decease. I am happy to say that our researches with regard to the identity of Stillwall's informant have proved eminently successful."

"Good work!" I exclaimed. "Who is the scoundrel?"

"A gentleman called Leighton. I am informed that his christian name is Terence."

"Terry!" I stared at him for a moment, and then broke into a shout of laughter. "Good Lord, if I'd had an ounce of sense I should have guessed it at once."

"Indeed?" Mr. Chetwynd elevated his eyebrows. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to interpret?"

"Oh, it's all as clear as daylight. Terry's an Irish-Cockney I ran across in Spain. He's a grand chap in his own way, full of fun and high spirits, and about as tough as they make 'em. We were in the same crowd together—the one that got wiped out when Jerry came over with his planes."

"You think he is genuinely under the impression you were killed?"

"Not a bit of it. We said good-bye to each other the next morning, and parted on the best of terms. He wanted to have a shot at getting across the Pyrénées, but as I'd damaged my leg and didn't feel like mountaineering I decided to make for the coast. We agreed that if we both got to London we'd rout each other out and have something in the way of a celebration. I'd love to see the old ruffian again, and hear how he managed to scrape through."

"There would appear to be every prospect of your doing so." Mr. Chetwynd rubbed his chin reflectively. "Isn't it slightly odd that a man for whom you entertain such friendly feelings should apparently be prepared to assist in swindling you out of your inheritance?"

"Not if you knew Terry." I laughed again. "He probably saw that advertisement in the *Continental Mail* and jumped to the conclusion that there was something to be made out of it. He wouldn't be put off by the trifling fact that when he last saw me I happened to be very much alive."

"From what I know of Irish people," observed Mrs. Chetwynd, "I feel sure that Alan is perfectly correct."

"I am inclined to agree with you, and I am also inclined to think that for once in his life Stillwall has been a shade too enterprising." Mr. Chetwynd nodded contentedly. "If we can prove that he has been bribing a witness to give false testimony——"

"Where is Terry?" I demanded. "Do you know whether he's actually in London?"

"According to information received, as the police put it, he was in consultation with our opponents yesterday afternoon."

"Was he, by jove! Then I know where to find him. He gave me the name of a pub off Tottenham Court Road;

some unholy little joint which he uses as his headquarters." I sat up excitedly. "How about my toddling along there after dinner and seeing whether I can run him to earth?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea. We certainly ought to get in touch with him as soon as possible. If he is the type of man you describe I fancy we can look forward to some highly entertaining developments."

"Couldn't you put it off till to-morrow?" suggested Mrs. Chetwynd. "I am sure you must be tired out after all your exertions."

"Now I've had a drink," I assured her, "I feel as fresh as a two-year-old. If you'll take care of Suzanne while I'm on the job I'll pick her up here afterwards and drive her home. I don't suppose I'll be away for more than about an hour."

"Why not bring him along with you? He sounds a most interesting person, and I should like to make his acquaintance."

I glanced doubtfully at our host. "Would that meet with your professional approval?" I inquired.

"Provided he is moderately sober." Mr. Chetwynd gave another of his dry chuckles. "It would be a fitting termination to what we might describe as a pleasantly unconventional day."

## II

Pulling up on the opposite side of the narrow street, I looked across at The Lamb and Flag. It was a comparatively small pub, with a distinctly unprepossessing appearance. The centre portion consisted of a clouded plate-glass window dimly lighted from within, on either side of which two doors, one marked "Bar" and the other "Saloon," presented a choice of social atmosphere to its prospective patrons. It somehow gave the impression of being quite content with its own clientele and having no desire to attract more custom.

Discarding the stump of one of Chetwynd's excellent cigars, I sauntered hopefully across the roadway. As I reached the pavement the door of the saloon entrance swung open. A stout lady clasping a bottle of gin lurched out into the night, and dodging aside with a murmured apology, I found

myself stepping forward into a thickly-blended odour of beer and tobacco smoke. It was so overpowering that for a moment I felt half stupefied.

There were a number of customers present, most of them belonging to the male gender, and at my first glance round I could see no one who bore the remotest resemblance to Terry. Then, to my huge delight, I suddenly spotted him. He was up in the far corner, lounging against the bar and talking to a young woman, a rather pretty girl with dark, languishing eyes, who appeared to be completely enraptured by the eloquence of his conversation. In place of the tattered rags in which I had last seen him dressed, he was now sporting a smartly-cut blue suit.

With a feeling of mischievous amusement I strolled up behind him and slipped into a vacant place at the counter. In doing so I intentionally jostled his arm. It had precisely the result I expected, for, setting down his glass with a bang, he jerked round like an enraged tiger.

"Ye clumsy lout!" he exclaimed. "Why the devil——"

"Hullo, Terry!" I smiled at him amiably. "Haven't forgotten how to swear, I see."

His jaw fell open and he gaped at me incredulously.

"Fancy our barging into each other like this," I continued. "Seems almost too good to be true, doesn't it?"

"Holy Saints!" A slow grin spread across his face, and the next instant he was crushing my hand in a paralysing grip.

"Well, well, now, would you believe it! How in the name of Satan——"

"Don't you remember? You told me about this pub, and asked me to look you up. Said that if you weren't here I was to leave a message with the landlord."

"Sure and I did." He let go of my numbed fingers, and with a sudden chuckle slapped me on the shoulder. "Have a drink, me boy, and let me introduce you to me young lady friend. Pauline, me darlin', this is an old pal of mine, a grand lad who was out with me in Spain."

"How d'you do," I observed.

"Pleased to meet you," returned Pauline affably.

"Three doubles, Mike." Pulling out a crumpled note from his trouser pocket Terry slapped it down on the bar. "And while you're about it you'd better have one yourself. You don't often get the chance of drinking with a fellow who ought to be dead and buried."

"Why, whatever are you talking about?" demanded Pauline.

"Never you mind, me darlin'. 'Tis a private matter between me and him which we'll be after discussin' later on."

"If it's all the same to you, Terry," I said, "I'd like to have a chat as soon as possible. Sorry to break up the party, but unfortunately things are a bit awkward."

"Have it your own way." He gave a careless shrug, and turned to Pauline. "You be a good girl and wait here for a minute or two."

"Where are you going?" she inquired suspiciously.

Without troubling to reply he addressed himself to the landlord. "Might I be borrowin' the office a moment, Mike? I've a little matter o' business to talk over with me friend here."

"Why, sure." Taking down a key from its hook the speaker passed it across the bar. "Turn off the light and lock the door when you come out: that's all I ask."

"Don't worry, I'll see to it."

Moving towards a door marked "Private," Terry led the way into a stuffy little apartment, the furniture of which consisted of an untidily littered table and a couple of moth-eaten chairs. Piled up against the wall stood a large heap of unopened cigarette cartons.

"This is better, eh? Wouldn't do to start chewin' the rag out there. Never know who might be listenin'." Grinning cheerfully, he lowered himself into one of the chairs, and, placing his whisky beside him, made an inviting gesture towards the other. "Take a pew, me boy," he continued. "May as well make yourself comfortable even if you're after me blood."

I accepted the suggestion, and for a moment we sat facing each other in silence.

"Terry, you old blackguard," I said, "what the blazes have you been up to? How dare you sign statements which you know to be a pack of lies?"

"Now don't be getting excited. Sure there's no need for that." Leaning across amiably he patted me on the knee. "I'll tell you all about it, laddie, and may the divil take me soul if it's not the honest truth that I'm giving ye."

"I'm listening," I said encouragingly.

"Well, 'twas this way." He paused to relight his cigarette. "I had the hell of a time scrambling across those blasted mountains and getting into France, but by the mercy o' God, and a little help from a girl who happened to take a liking to me, I got through in the end, and fetched up in Paris. 'Twas there I read a piece about you in the papers."

"Advertising for somebody who had seen me go West?"

"That's so. And offering what sounded like good money." He shrugged again. "Well, there it was, me boy. Where was the sense in letting some damned Dago step in and collect the dibs! If it was a witness they were after, what was wrong with meself?"

"Nothing much," I admitted. "Merely the trifling fact that you hadn't seen me peg out."

"And what difference would that be making? Would it be hurtin' you to die a day or two sooner?"

"Not seriously." I laughed. "Go on, you scoundrel. Tell me what happened when you went to see Stillwall."

"'Twas as much as I could do to stop the fat slob from kissin' me. Might have been me mother welcomin' home her wandering boy!"

"How much did he pay you?" I inquired.

"Only me expenses!" Terry winked. "Couldn't do more than that, you see, not without getting himself into trouble."

"I suppose they'd totted up to a nice little sum by then."

"They had and all. A hundred and fifty pounds was what we worked it out at—seventy-five pounds for signing the paper, and the rest to be paid after I'd been along to the Court and had a word with the judge. Looks to me as if I'd be whistlin' for that now." He shook his head regretfully, and took a long drink.

"I'm afraid you will unless you want to be run in for perjury." I paused. "Still, I don't know," I added. "If you'll agree to do as I suggest there's quite a good chance that you might collect the whole amount."

"You're meaning that?" He sat up hopefully.

"Listen to me for a minute, and I'll put you wise to the business." I looked round to make certain that the door was securely shut. "While I was out in Spain something happened. An old relation of mine died, and when I got back the other day I found that he'd left me about three thousand a year and a house in Hampstead."

"Mother o' mercy! Is that a fact now?"

"It's the gospel truth. He also left three hundred a year to one of my cousins, a chap called Maurice Trevor, who is the sort of smug twirp you feel like kicking at sight. There was a clause in the will that if either of us turned up our toes before the old boy the survivor came in for the whole shoot."

"Was there, be gum!" Terry's eyes narrowed. "Faith," he continued, "now I'm beginning to take your meaning."

"The thing sticks out a mile. No one had heard of me for about nine months, and our friend Maurice, who naturally hoped I'd been wiped out, went along to this crook solicitor, Stillwall, and got him to file a petition. In the meantime they shoved that advertisement into the *Continental Mail* in the hope that somebody like yourself would roll up and swear that he'd seen me killed. Then they would just go ahead and claim the estate."

"And to think that all I got out of 'em was a measly seventy-five quid! 'Tis enough to break a fellow's heart."

"Serve you right," I remarked callously. "The joke of the whole thing is that at present they haven't the remotest idea that I'm back in London. My lawyer, Mr. Chetwynd, is arranging to spring it on them as an unpleasant surprise. I don't know how he means to work it, but that's where you stand a chance of collecting the rest of your money. If you'll come along to his house now, tell him the facts and agree to do what he asks, I'll promise to let you have the other seventy-five out of my own pocket."

"You will! Then why the devil are we wastin' time talkin'?" Gulping down the remainder of his drink Terry scrambled up out of his chair. "I'll just have to say a word to Pauline," he added, "so maybe you'd best wait for me outside."

Five minutes later, exactly as a neighbouring clock was striking ten, we were climbing into a taxi at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. All the way down to Chester Square Terry kept me entertained with a vivid account of his experiences in getting across the frontier and making his way to Paris, and so exciting and amusing was his story that the journey seemed to be accomplished in an amazingly short time. It was a tale which, delivered as an unexpurgated broadcast, would certainly have succeeded in brightening up the B.B.C.

"There's something I'd better mention before we go in," I observed, as I mounted the step and pressed the bell. "The beautiful vision you're about to meet is a girl called Suzanne Despard. It's no use your trying to fascinate her. She's going to marry me."

"Sure, and I don't blame her." He gripped my arm and gave it a friendly squeeze. "Why, dammit, me boy, with all that money you've got I'd marry ye meself."

Before I could think of a suitable retort the door opened, and following the butler, who had evidently received his instructions, we crossed the hall and were ushered into the study. As we entered its three occupants rose expectantly from their seats.

"Well, I've found him," I remarked triumphantly, "and, what's more, I've brought him along. This is Mr. Terence Leighton, the romantic liar who says he saw me pass out."

"Pleased to meet you, ladies, and you too, sorr." Terry bowed affably. "There's been a slight misunderstanding with regard to what me friend here was alluding to, but now we've had a chance to talk it over sure the whole thing is as clear as daylight. I've given him me word as a gentleman that he can count upon me to help him get his rights."

"That is most reassuring." I could see Mr. Chetwynd's eyes twinkling. "Won't you sit down and make yourself



comfortable? You will find whisky and cigars on that table beside you."

We all seated ourselves in a half circle, Terry, as he did so, dispatching an admiring glance in the direction of Suzanne.

"Now you've got that little burst of oratory off your chest," I remarked, "just fire ahead and deliver the goods. Tell them how you came across that advertisement in the paper, and what happened when you went to interview Stillwall. I want them to hear the whole disgraceful story."

With leisurely care Terry helped himself to a cigar, and having made sure that it was properly alight, leaned back and crossed his legs. Then, serenely at his ease, he proceeded to obey my instructions.

While he was talking I devoted my attention to watching Suzanne. I had never seen her look so adorably attractive. She was leaning slightly forward with her chin cupped between her two hands and her dark hazel eyes riveted upon Terry.

"Well, that's how it was, sorr," he finished unperturbably, "and maybe I was a bit hasty in putting me name to the paper. I won't be saying I'm altogether satisfied about me own part in the business, but 'tis a cruel thing to see money going to waste when it can be picked up for the mere asking."

"I can quite understand," observed Mrs. Chetwynd. "I should probably have felt like that myself."

"Thank you, madam." Terry beamed at her genially. "It's sorry I am if I've caused any inconveniences to my friend, Alan, or to this gentleman here. I admit I was, as you might say, a bit careless, and if there's any small service I can do to make up for it——" He finished with an expressive shrug.

"I think that your co-operation might be extremely useful." Mr. Chetwynd stroked his nose thoughtfully. "I take it that in spite of the—er—grant for expenses which you have already accepted you no longer regard yourself as being under any obligation to Mr. Stillwall?"

"And why should I then? He's got me signature, which is what he paid for, and seeing 'tis a free country he can go

ahead and do what he likes with it. If he's hopin' to get any of his money back he must be more of a fool than he looks."

"That seems to sum up the situation admirably." Our host paused. "Well, perhaps the best plan will be for you to give me your address. I have several matters to arrange, and as soon as they are completed I will get in touch with you and send you instructions."

"Make it The Lamb and Flag, in Chapel Street, sorr. That's me headquarters for the time being. If you should be wishful to ring ould Mike will take the message."

Reaching for a sheet of paper from the desk, Chetwynd jotted down a brief note. This he folded up and put away in his breast pocket.

"Thank you, Mr. Leighton," he remarked. "I can only say that it has been a great pleasure and satisfaction to make your acquaintance."

"The same to you, sorr." With another genial grin Terry uncrossed his legs. "And now, if you'll pardon me, I think 'tis about time that I was takin' me leave. I've a young lady friend waitin' for me up West, and it's a black temper she'll be in if I keep her kicking her heels much longer."

"In that case we mustn't detain you. Alan will see you off, and if all goes well I shall look forward to meeting you again very shortly."

"Then I'll wish you good night, ladies." With a grandiloquent bow to Suzanne and Mrs. Chetwynd, Terry swaggered across the room, and following him out into the hall I closed the door behind us.

"Well, me boy," he inquired, as I handed him his hat, "and how d'ye think the ould gentleman took it?"

"He liked you," I said, "and so did the others. Heaven knows why. It must be that famous Irish charm of yours."

"Ah, come now, don't be gettin' jealous." He dug me in the ribs. "What would ye need to be complaining of with a beautiful dream like that all to yourself? Sure you're the luckiest man outside of Paradise."

"You're telling me!" I laughed and shot back the catch.

"For once in your life, Terry," I added, "I believe you're telling the truth."

When I got back into the study it was Mrs. Chetwynd who was the first to greet me.

"My dear Alan, he's superb! If I was twenty years younger I should fall hopelessly and shamelessly in love with him."

"Rascals of that type," observed her husband, "have an irresistible attraction for women. It is one of three happy circumstances which help to keep solicitors in practice."

"What do you propose to do?" I demanded. "Keep him in cold storage and let them go ahead with their action?"

"I have a better idea than that." Mr. Chetwynd smiled mysteriously. "We won't discuss it now because I think it's high time that Miss Despard was in bed and asleep. I will tell Hammond to ring up for a taxi and——"

"Oh, but, please," protested Suzanne. "I——"

"Don't argue, my dear," broke in Mrs. Chetwynd. "Robert is talking sense, and you ought to go home at once." She turned to me. "This is where you should exert your authority, Alan. If you are going to be married it will be useful practice."

I stepped forward to the couch and took Suzanne's hands.

"Get up," I said firmly. "Get up at once and put your hat on."

With a little, tired laugh she allowed me to pull her to her feet.

"Now I know that my grandfather was right. He always used to say that Englishmen beat their wives."

"It was the foundation of our national greatness." Mr. Chetwynd chuckled, and patted her shoulder. "Unfortunately," he added, "it went out with the Prince Consort."

"What do you think he means to do?"

"Couldn't tell you: he has got something up his sleeve though." I leaned back a trifle so that Suzanne could rest her head against my shoulder more comfortably. "Have you quite forgiven me?" I inquired, as the taxi swung round the corner into Sloane Street.

"Forgiven you?" she murmured drowsily. "What for?"

"All those lies I confessed to in the tea shop. Telling you that

my name was Russell, telling you that I was a romantic adventurer and letting you believe——”

“Oh that!” She rubbed her cheek gently against my coat. “You stupid darling, there is nothing to forgive. Why, I would much rather be Mrs. Reid. I think Mrs. Russell is a silly name. It sounds as though one made a noise when one walked about.”

I laughed and kissed the tip of her ear. “Tell me, Angel-face, when did it first strike you that I wasn’t entirely repulsive?”

“It was when you tripped up that man and gave me back my bag. You smiled at me so nicely that I could not help loving you straight away.”

“Then it was practically a dead heat. Before you’d said ‘*c’était très gentil*’ or something of the kind, I was utterly and hopelessly besotted. I felt like Dante when he suddenly bumped into Beatrice.”

“That is how I like you to talk. My own darling, if only I was not so tired I would sit and listen to you all night.” She sighed regretfully. “What can I do though—how can I risk hurting your feelings? It would be dreadful if I was to go to sleep just when you were telling me how much you loved me.”

“I should shrivel up from sheer humiliation.” I tucked back a stray curl which had tumbled forward across her forehead. “Don’t worry, Beautiful, it will soon be to-morrow and we have a whole lifetime in front of us. Just shut your eyes and lie just as you are, and when you get to the flat I’ll give you a kiss and let you know.”

“But that will be lovely.” Her arm crept softly round my neck, and with a contented sigh she snuggled up a little closer.

## CHAPTER XII

THE Underground lift gates clashed back, and wandering down a white tiled passage Suzanne and I stepped out on to the narrow, sun-lit pavement of Heath Street. The

clock on the tower opposite was pointing to a quarter to twelve.

"No need to hurry ourselves," I remarked. "It's only just up the hill and round the corner."

"I feel terribly excited." She slipped her arm through mine. "I wonder why Mr. Chetwynd asked us to come up here instead of to his office."

"We shall soon find out. There's something in the wind obviously: otherwise he wouldn't have sent for Terry." I drew in a long breath of the fresh Hampstead air. "What I'm looking forward to chiefly is seeing old Bates again. I hope he'll stay on with us, that's to say if he meets with your approval."

"Why, of course he will. I am sure he must be nice from what you have told me about him." She laughed happily. "This morning I feel as though I loved everybody, at least everybody except that horrible cousin of yours who wanted you to die. As for him, I would like to slap his face."

"So you shall," I promised her. "We'll decoy him round one day, and I'll hold his arms while you do it."

We branched off down Quaker's Row, and in another minute or so the wrought-iron gates of Bracken Hall came into view on our right. In contrast to our previous visit they were standing hospitably open.

"This must be some of Bates's work," I observed. "He's evidently trying to do the thing in proper style. 'Young Squire' and beautiful fiancée arrive at ancestral home.' Pity he couldn't rake up a little music and one or two cheering retainers."

We passed through into the paved courtyard, and, skirting round the fountain, directed our steps towards the front door. As we approached it swung open and Bates himself appeared on the threshold.

"Welcome, Mr. Alan. Welcome back to Bracken Hall." He bowed to each of us in turn, and then, straightening up with a beaming face, moved aside to make room for our entrance.

"Well, well, this seems almost too good to be true." Casting ceremony to the winds I gripped his hand and wrung it

warmly. "Hang it all, Bates, you haven't altered in the slightest. You look exactly as you did the last time you filled up my glass."

"Indeed, Mr. Alan. I am glad you think so." His eyes travelled over me with a sort of affectionate concern. "But you, sir,—if you'll pardon my mentioning it—you appear to have lost a good deal of weight. I am afraid you must have had to endure a great many privations out in Spain."

"Oh, I've been roughing it a little. One can't expect early morning tea in the middle of a civil war." I made a gesture towards Suzanne. "I want to introduce you to Miss Despard. I don't know whether Mr. Chetwynd has broken the glad news, but for some unaccountable reason she has consented to marry me."

"I congratulate you, sir." Bates bowed again. "And if you won't think it a liberty, Miss, I should like to congratulate you as well. I would venture the opinion that you are both equally fortunate."

"But that is charming." Suzanne smiled, and gave him her hand.

"Bates always says the right thing. He'd have made a marvellous ambassador." I glanced enquiringly round the hall. "Where's Mr. Chetwynd? Hasn't he put in an appearance yet?"

"He is in the library, sir, talking to a gentleman named Mr. Leighton. My instructions were to take you there as soon as you arrived." Shepherding us across to the apartment in question he gave a discreet cough and pushed open the door. "Miss Despard and Mr. Reid," he announced almost jubilantly.

"Ah, that's splendid!"

Terry and Mr. Chetwynd, who were seated at the round table in the centre, both rose to their feet. It was the latter who had spoken, and from the sound of his voice I got the impression that he was feeling distinctly pleased with himself. "You know what to do when the others turn up," he continued. "Show them straight in, and then just wait around somewhere handy until you hear me ring the bell,"

"Very good, sir," replied Bates.

"Who are 'the others'?" I demanded as the door closed behind him.

"I have an agreeable surprise for you. I have persuaded Mr. Trevor and his legal adviser to attend an informal conference at which we can discuss the question as to whether it is necessary to proceed with the proposed action. In my capacity as executor I am naturally anxious to avoid frittering away money." His eyes twinkled.

"A real brainwave!" I looked at him admiringly. "What's the exact programme?"

He opened the door of the small writing-room adjoining. "I suggest that you should wait in here while Stillwall and I attempt to arrive at a friendly understanding. I am anxious to hear what the rogue has to suggest. I shall allow him time to give himself away thoroughly, and then at the right moment I propose to invite you and Mr. Leighton to step in and join the party. It should be a dramatic and interesting dénouement."

"It will that," observed Terry cheerfully.

"You will let me come too?" pleaded Suzanne. "I could not bear to miss seeing their faces."

"By all means, my dear. The more the merrier. I only regret that I was unable to include Elizabeth. That, I fear, would have been exceeding the bounds of professional decorum."

"How soon does the curtain go up?" I enquired.

"Twelve-twenty is the appointed time. They ought to be here any minute now. On the whole I think it would be safer if you were to go into retirement straight away. I wouldn't put it past Stillwall to peer in through the window." He conducted us into the writing-room, where a bottle of sherry and half a dozen glasses were set out on the table. "I thought you might like a little refreshment to beguile your vigil, and I may mention that the admirable Bates has arranged to provide us with lunch, which I am informed is to consist of a lobster salad and a cold chicken. I have taken the liberty of inviting our friend Mr. Leighton to join us."

"And it's pleased you'll be to hear that I've accepted," Terry winked gravely.

Before I could reply the faint trill of a bell echoed through the house, and turning round quickly Mr. Chetwynd raised a warning hand.

"The enemy appear to be at the gates, so I am afraid I must wish you *au revoir*. We shall meet again very shortly, and in the meanwhile all you have to do is to preserve a discreet silence. To put it a trifle more bluntly, for heaven's sake keep your mouths shut."

He stepped out into the library, closing the door after him, and coming over to the table I filled up three glasses of sherry. Armed with these we distributed ourselves hopefully about the room. Suzanne and I took possession of the couch in the window, Terry settling down in an arm-chair opposite and grinning encouragingly as he pledged us in a wordless toast. Apart from the ticking of the clock everything was quiet.

To our intense disgust, however, all our preparations for "listening in" proved to be completely wasted. The stout oak door, which dated back to the eighteenth century, was so solidly constructed that the two apartments on either side of it were both practically sound-proof. Keen as my hearing is, I could detect nothing but a faint, unintelligible murmur, and to judge by the strained frowns on the faces of Terry and Suzanne neither of them appeared to be in any better plight. It was all I could do to prevent myself knocking on the library wall and requesting its occupants to speak up.

I was just wondering how much longer my patience could hold out when the scrape of a chair being pushed back suddenly reached my ears. At the same instant I heard Chetwynd speaking, and for the first time his voice was plainly and refreshingly audible.

"I am afraid you are under a slight misapprehension. There are two reasons—two substantial reasons—why such a course would be out of the question. To save further discussion I propose to bring them to your notice."

The door swung back, and as we all three jumped to our feet an engaging tableau suddenly presented itself. Our visitors were standing at the table facing us, and it was



difficult to say which of the two appeared to be the most startled. Maurice had turned a sort of rich purple, while his companion, a ponderous, sallow-cheeked gentleman, with cunning little eyes, seemed to be labouring under some difficulty in the matter of getting his breath. Suave and smiling, Mr. Chetwynd beckoned us forward to join the sathering.

"I am sure you will be pleased to see that your apprehensions with regard to Mr. Reid's welfare have been totally unfounded. As you can observe for yourselves he is in excellent health. This other gentleman, I believe, you have already had the pleasure of meeting. I understand that through an unfortunate mistake he has been inadvertently responsible for placing you in this somewhat regrettable dilemma."

For a moment neither of them answered. They just stood where they were staring at us dumbly.

"Hullo, Maurice," I said, "what's the matter with you? You look as if you were going to be sick."

With a masterly effort Mr. Stillwall pulled himself together and turned to his client. "Do you recognize this person?" he demanded. "Is he really your cousin, Alan Reid?"

Maurice licked his lips. "Yes, that's him right enough." He glared viciously at Terry. "It's a dirty, put-up job of some sort, and this lying hound——"

"Easy on, now. If you aren't more civil you'll be getting your face pushed in." Terry's voice was dangerously quiet.

"I think you had better leave this to me." Stillwall drew himself up with a belated attempt at dignity. "Speaking as one solicitor to another, Mr. Chetwynd, I can only observe that your methods of conducting professional business strike me as being positively scandalous. I am astonished that you should have lent yourself to such proceedings."

"For once," replied Mr. Chetwynd drily, "I am quite prepared to believe your statement."

"Cheer up, Maurice," I interposed. "After all, things might be a lot worse. You will still have three hundred a year, minus a few legal expenses."

"While you have three thousand." He spat out the words

with a wealth of concentrated venom. "Well, I suppose you've earned it, crawling around and licking the old fool's boots."

"That's rude," I objected, "shockingly rude."

Before he could move I had taken a quick pace forward and swinging him round bodily, grabbed him by the collar and the seat of his trousers. There was a little ripple of laughter which appeared to come from the direction of Suzanne.

"Can I unlatch the door for you?" enquired Terry politely.

"If it's not too much trouble."

Taking a still firmer grip and digging my knuckles into the back of his neck, I steered Maurice towards the opening. After a brief tussle we barged our way through, and as we did so I caught a fleeting glimpse of Bates, who, to judge by his expression, was viewing the operation with a bland and approving interest. The next moment we had crossed the hall and stumbled out into the courtyard.

"Let me go," bellowed my captive. "Let me go, blast your soul."

"You *are* going," I retorted briefly.

With a final vigorous thrust I sent him lurching towards the fountain, the basin of which was protected by a three-inch stone coping. As I had hoped, his foot struck against it, and, taking an almost perfect header, he pitched forward into the surrounding water. The splash he made would have done credit to a hippopotamus.

"That'll wash the dandruff off him anyway." Chuckling appreciatively, Terry sauntered up alongside. "Left his hat behind him, so I thought I'd better bring it with me."

A brown homburg sailed neatly through the air, and plopped down on top of its blaspheming owner. Almost simultaneously the indignant figure of Mr. Stillwall emerged breathlessly through the doorway.

"This is an outrage," he gasped; "a brutal and criminal outrage. I——"

"Shut up, you fat twister." I took a step towards him. "If you don't clear out damned quick I'll chuck you in too."

There must have been something deeply convincing about the threat, for with an agility of which I should hardly have

thought him capable the pot-bellied rascal jumped back out of reach, and sidled hastily towards the gates. By this time Maurice had succeeded in extricating himself, and a more comical picture than the pair of them presented it has never been my good fortune to encounter.

"You infernal young ruffian, you'll hear more of this." Stillwall seemed to be almost suffocating with fury.

"Go away," I said, "you're disturbing the neighbourhood."

"And as for that perjured scoundrel——"

"Meaning me, by any chance?" Terry was already lounging forward, but whatever fresh disturbances might have been in the offing Mr. Stillwall was not waiting for them. Grasping the bedraggled Maurice by the elbow he pulled him hurriedly through the gates, and at the same instant I found Suzanne standing beside me, her hand resting lightly on my arm.

"You were right not to hit him," she observed approvingly. "It was much funnier that way."

"A most satisfying finale."

We all swung round, to find Mr. Chetwynd standing in the doorway.

"You're not annoyed with me then?" I looked at him enquiringly. "I was afraid that perhaps I had interfered with your arrangements."

"Far from it. In fact, it is more or less what I had hoped would happen. The only possible improvement I could have suggested would have been to treat Stillwall to a dose of the same medicine!"

"Would you like me to fetch him back?" suggested Terry.

Mr. Chetwynd shook his head regretfully. "No, I think we had better regard the incident as closed. A pity, in some ways, I admit. He is a most unpleasant piece of work, and I should have thoroughly enjoyed putting a stop to his activities. Unfortunately, as things have turned out, my hopes in that direction have had to be modified. We must content ourselves with having given both him and Mr. Maurice Trevor what is sometimes vulgarly referred to as 'a kick in the pants,' and

in trusting that the lesson will have a beneficial effect upon their future careers."

"Now that's what I call talking!" Terry nodded admiringly. "If I may make so bold as to say so, 'tis a treat to listen to you."

"I appreciate the compliment. Perhaps you wouldn't mind entertaining yourself for a few minutes while I have a word or two with our young friends here? Lunch is to be ready at one o'clock I understand."

"Sure, sorr, I'll be all right. I'll just have a stroll round and freshen up me appetite."

With a genial wave Terry sauntered off, and re-entering the house Mr. Chetwynd led the way back into the library.

"I have some pleasantly encouraging news for you," he announced. "As it chiefly concerns Miss Despard I thought you would prefer to hear it in private."

"Oh, please tell me quickly," Suzanne clasped her hands. "I have been so worried, wondering what has happened."

"There have been some interesting developments. In the first place the police have examined Grantley's box at the bank, and among its contents there was one article which promises to have a very important bearing upon their future line of action." He paused deliberately, as though enjoying our suspense. "It was an emerald cross of distinctive and unmistakable workmanship. It has already been identified as having been formerly in the collection of the late M. Andre Dubois."

"But that is splendid! Now they will believe that I was telling them the truth."

"They appear to be coming round to that conclusion." Mr. Chetwynd smiled reassuringly. "I gather from my friend Warren that the French police are completely satisfied that Vincent Grantley and Robert Norton were one and the same person. Since the information they have extracted from the doctor at Bordeaux fully confirms your evidence with regard to Marie Péchin's confession they have no doubt that the identity of your grandfather's murderer is at last fully established. There will be certain formal proceedings over there which it may be necessary for you to attend, but on the

other hand they may be content to accept a properly attested statement."

"How about our breaking into the house?" I demanded. "Any sign of a charitable spirit on the part of the authorities?"

"The prospects appear to be hopeful. Warren seems to consider that as you were largely instrumental in clearing up a couple of serious crimes a lenient attitude towards your own misdemeanours would not be altogether out of place." He peered at me quizzically over the top of his spectacles. "Apart from any difficulties that you may have with your friends at the University——"

"Oh, I'm not seriously perturbed about them." I grinned. "When they discover that I've come into three thousand a year they'll be all round my neck. I shall probably be invited to join the Faculty."

"I shouldn't be surprised. I have observed that the academic mind is not altogether uninfluenced by material considerations."

"It is to you that we owe everything." Suzanne stepped forward impulsively and kissed him on both cheeks. "You have been so clever and so kind to me that I do not know how to thank you."

"I can only say you have selected a most acceptable method." Mr. Chetwynd placed his hands on her shoulders and repeated the operation. "And now, my dear, as I still have one or two trifling matters to attend to before lunch perhaps you would take Alan away and make him show you round the house. I am sure you must be thirsting to inspect the scene of your future felicity."

"Come on," I said laughingly. "We'll go and have a look at the garden. It will be safer there. If we stay here any longer I shall probably start kissing him myself."

In the hall we ran across Bates, who was just emerging from the dining-room. I could see by his manner that he was anxious to speak to me, and remembering that he had been a witness of my little fracas with Maurice I considered it only tactful to afford him the opportunity.

"Hope we didn't give you too much of a shock," I remarked. "Mr. Trevor irritated me, and I'm afraid I lost my temper."

"It's not to be wondered at, sir. Mr. Trevor has that effect upon quite a number of people." Stepping forward Bates opened the french window for us. "I trust that you have not over-strained yourself," he added solicitously.

I shook my head. "On the contrary, I could do it all over again with the greatest ease and pleasure."

We passed out on the sun-warmed terrace, and at her first sight of the garden Suzanne uttered a little cry of delight. It was certainly looking at its most attractive. The roses were in full bloom, and their fragrant perfume, mingled with the rich, comforting odour of heliotrope, seemed to float up to us like a welcoming caress. Somewhere close at hand an unseen blackbird was fluting joyously.

"Think you can be happy here?" I enquired.

"Why, it is too lovely. It is like coming home to something one has been dreaming about all one's life." She seated herself on the low parapet and reaching out a hand drew me down beside her. "The most wonderful part is that there is no longer anything to spoil it. I am not sure, but I feel somehow that unless I had found out the whole truth I could never have been perfectly happy, not even with you. Now"—she gave a long sigh—"well, it is just the sort of ending they always have in fairy stories."

I put my arm round her, and we sat for a moment or two in blissful silence.

"I know who you remind me of," I said. "It's Imogen."

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages."

"Who was Imogen?" she demanded.

"A Princess," I explained. "One of Shakespeare's heroines who was always losing her way and fainting for lack of food."

She laughed softly. "It is exactly what I shall do unless I have some lunch soon. I was so excited this morning that I could not eat my breakfast."

"I could only dally with mine," I remarked.

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